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THE IMMORTAL
HULK
"The greatest run in the history of the Incredible Hulk."
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# THE IMMORTAL HULK

# THE IMMORTAL HULK

## AL EWING
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PENCILER
RUY JOSÉ
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COLORIST
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PAUL MOUNTS
COLORIST
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ARTIST/COLORIST/LETTERER

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GARRY BROWN
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COVER ARTIST

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ARTIST
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COLORIST
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DONO SÁNCHEZ-ALMARA
COLORIST
VC's CORY PETIT
LETTERER
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COLORIST
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VC's TRAVIS LANHAM
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COLORIST
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COVER ARTIST

*IMMORTAL HULK: TIME OF MONSTERS*
ALEX PAKNADEL & AL EWING
STORY
ALEX PAKNADEL
SCRIPT
JUAN FERREYRA
ARTIST
VC's CORY PETIT
LETTERER
JUAN FERREYRA
COVER ART
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PROFESSOR NATALIE MUNRO & DR. STEPHEN CURTIS

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WRITERS
LAN MEDINA
ARTIST
ANTONIO FABELA
COLORIST
VC's JOE SABINO
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COVER ART

ALANNA SMITH
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AVENGERS
684
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HEY! WHAT ARE YA TRYIN' TO DO?
MAKE THEM THINK I'M CHICKEN?
COME ON, YOU FOOL!
WE'VE GOT TO REACH THE PROTECTIVE TRENCH BEFORE THE BOMB GOES OFF!
BOMB?
THERE! YOU'RE SAFE!
AND NOW I'LL
YEARS AGO...

...A DOOR OPENED.
THEY SAY BRUCE BANNER SCREAMED FOR HOURS.
THEY SAY HE WOULDN'T STOP.

HE COULDN'T STOP.
...A SURPRISING LACK OF RADIATION IN THE BODY, CONSIDERING.
THE...THE BODY?
OH, YES. I'M SORRY-- I KNOW YOU BROUGHT HIM BACK IN AS QUICKLY AS YOU COULD--
--BUT DOCTOR BANNER IS DEAD, SON.
I MEAN, LOOK WHAT HAPPENED.
HOW COULD HE NOT BE--
HHAAH!
EEAAAAAAHHHH!
DEAR LORD--
NO MATTER WHAT.
AAAAAHHH!
AAAAAAAAHHH!

SHHLUCKK
NO
GENTLEMEN, THE TRAITOR IS DEAD!
MATTER
BRUCE BANNER...IS DEAD.
WHAT.
HE NEVER UNDERSTOOD. NOT FULLY.
HE NEVER SAW THE DOOR.
BUT AS THE YEARS PASSED...

...PERHAPS HE SUSPECTED.
...
WHAT IS THIS, BRUCE?
INSIDE THAT CASING IS A CUSTOM-BUILT ARROW TIP, CLINT. GAMMA-ENRICHED VIBRANIUM. VERY RARE.
AND FAR MORE PRECISE THAN A BULLET.
"ESPECIALLY IN YOUR HANDS.
"AIM FOR THE BASE OF THE BRAIN.
"THE HYPOTHALAMUS."
THAT WILL INSTANTLY AND UTTERLY DESTROY ALL AUTONOMIC FUNCTIONS.
THERE'S A SPARE, IN CASE YOU MISS. IF YOU DON'T NEED IT FOR MY HEAD, PUT IT THROUGH MY HEART.
I'VE DONE THE MATH, CLINT. I'VE DONE THE BIOLOGY.
THIS WILL KILL ME.

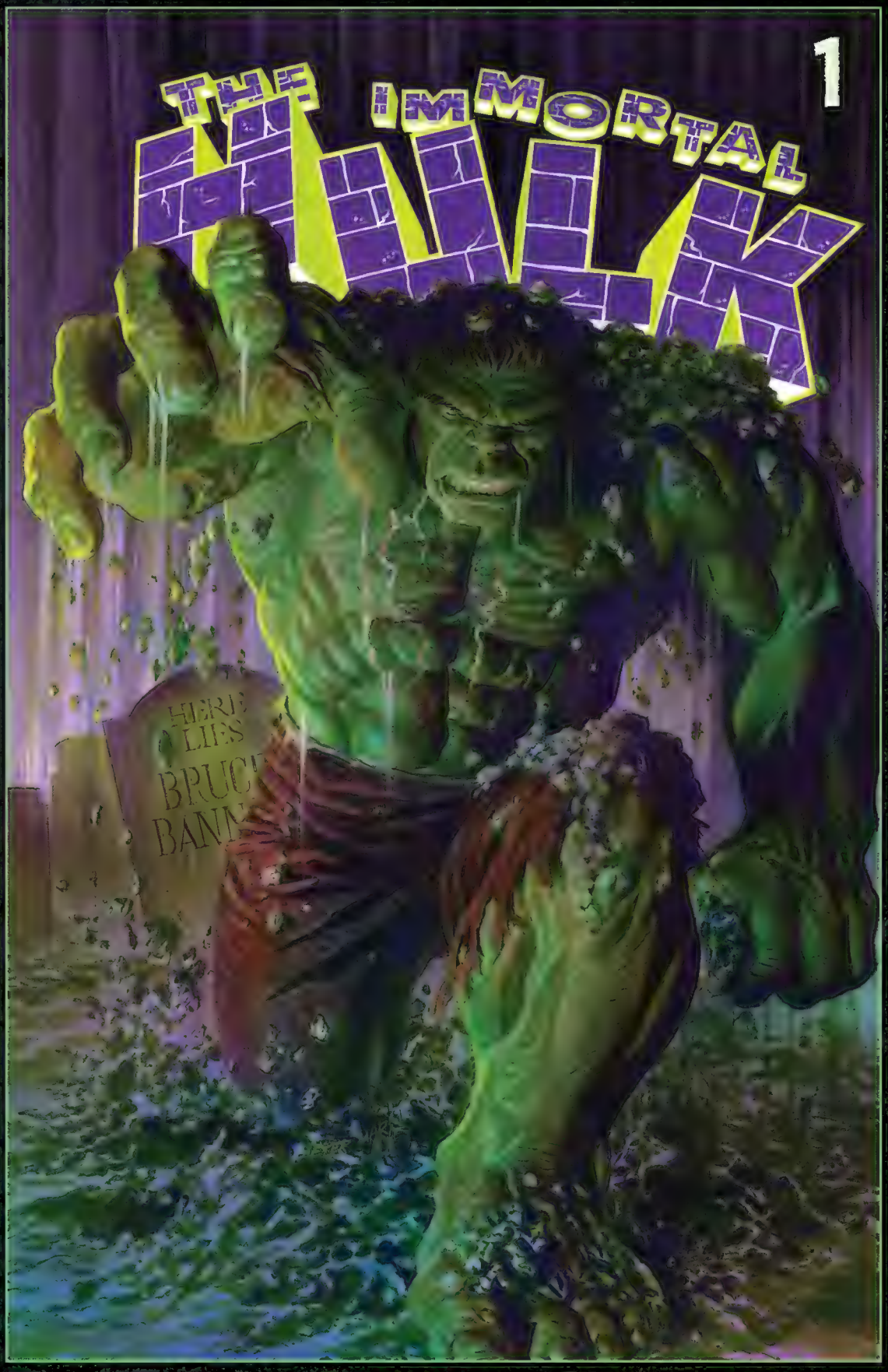
"IT WILL END ME--END THE HULK--IN A WAY NO 'HEALING FACTOR' CAN COUNTERACT.
"A WAY THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO COME BACK FROM."
BRUCE...
SCIENTIFICALLY. MAGICALLY.
IMPOSSIBLE.
PROMISE ME, CLINT.
PROMISE ME.
IT'S FUNNY.
ISN'T IT FUNNY?
...what?
FORGIVE ME, DR. BANNER.

Dr. Voodoo? What...what's happening?
Is this you?
THE HAND'S MAGIC IS DEEP IN YOU...
...THIS WILL HURT.
No, I-- I don't feel anything. What is this?
Hello?
STOP. IF YOU TAKE THE HULK FROM THE HAND...THEN WE WILL CLAIM YOUR BROTHER...
But... I don't feel anything.
No pain-- no outside control--
Voodoo, listen to me-- they don't have the Hulk! They're not directing him-- he's just loose! Just awake!
It's a trick-- don't choose me over--
I CHOOSE MY BROTHER... BRUCE BANNER.
YOU HAVE TO LAUGH, ANYWAY.
WHEN ALL HOPE DIES, YOU HAVE TO LAUGH, OR SCREAM.
YOU ARE FREE, BRUCE BANNER.
WALK IN PEACE TO THE LIGHT.
You...you can't even hear me, can you?
Do it, then. Lay me to rest.
Maybe this time...
OR CRY.

OR MAKE SOME SMALL SOUND, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ALL THREE...
HRRHH
...AND THAT'S THE FUNNY PART, FAUSTUS.
THE PROCEDURE SHOULD HAVE TAKEN MUCH LONGER. DAYS, PERHAPS.
IT'S AS IF HIS CORPSE WAS JUST WAITING FOR THE EXCUSE...
ANYWAY--I'VE TAKEN PRECAUTIONS. THE SUPREME LEADER NEEDN'T KNOW, BUT... EXACTLY. IMPLANTED IN THE HYPOTHALAMUS--TIME-DELAYED. THERE'LL BE NO COMING BACK.
IF HE DIDN'T RETURN TO LIFE ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE--
--I CAN AT LEAST MAKE SURE HE DIES AT THE PROPER...
...AH.
Look at you. You can't help it, can you?
All you people--you can't let me rest. You just prod at me. Like picking a scab.
You can't even let me be dead...
Fine. I'll keep your damned secret. Just...make sure this time.
And when it's done... please...
...leave me alone.
YOU CAN HEAR THE SOUND IN HIS VOICE NOW

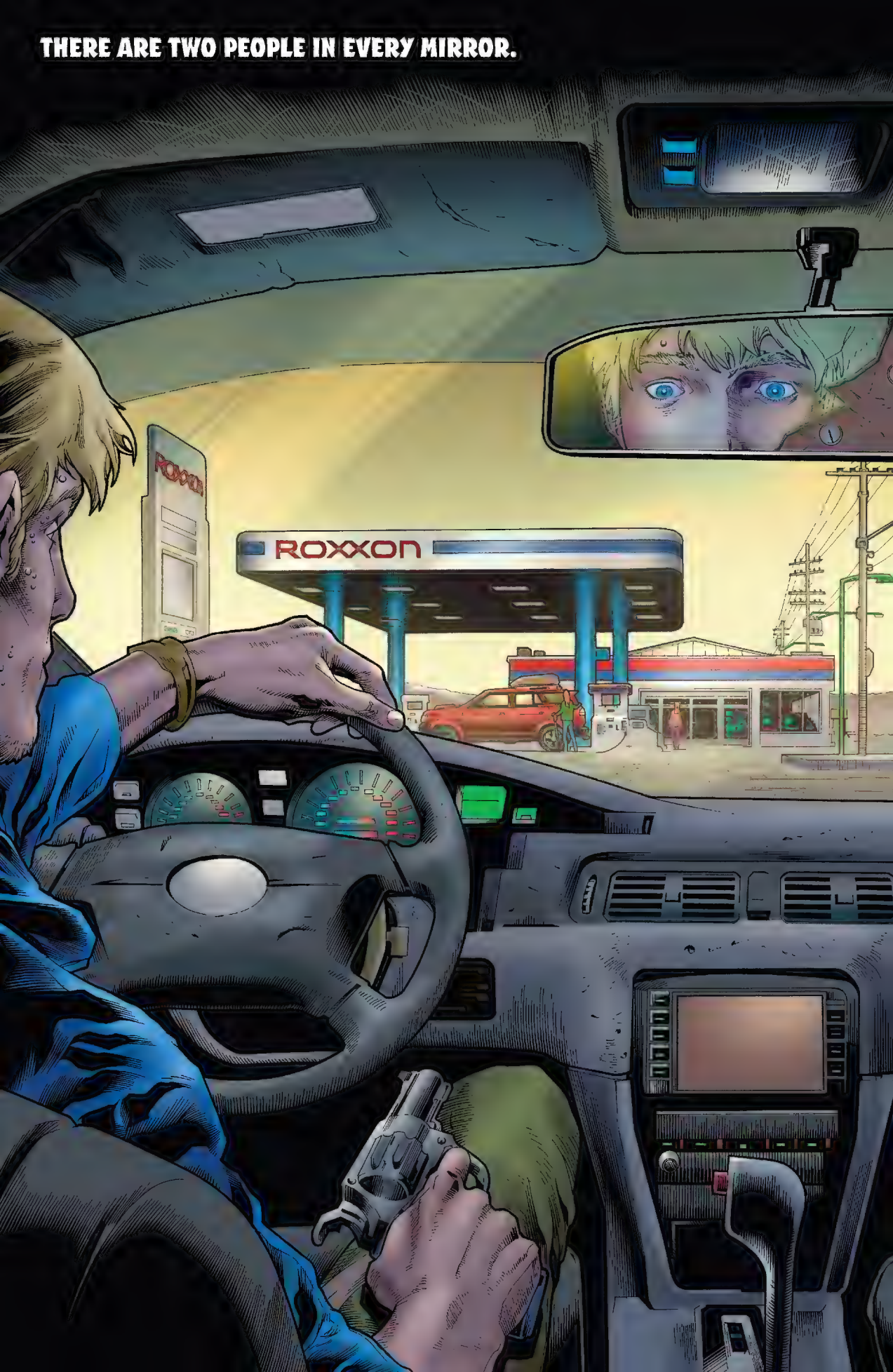
IN HIS HATE
DEEP DOWN... HE KNOWS.
HE KNOWS THERE'S NO MAGIC DOING THIS. NO MAGIC SCIENCE. NOBODY ELSE.
IT'S JUST HIM BEING HIM.
THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALWAYS BEEN.
BUT LOOK AT HIM. LYING DOWN AT THE APPOINTED HOUR...
HE STILL WANTS TO PRETEND TO SLEEP. TO BE LEFT ALONE.
HE STILL HAS SOME SMALL ATOM OF HOPE.
HRRHH. ONE MORE, THEN.
ONE MORE PROD. ONE MORE PICK OF THE SCAB. ONE MORE WAKE-UP CALL.
TO LET HIM KNOW WHAT HE IS.
THE OPENER OF THE DOOR.
THE SCREAM THAT CANNOT STOP.
THE RAGE THAT WILL NOT DIE...

# THE IMMORTAL HULK


THE IMMORTAL
HULK
1
HERE
LIES
BRUCE
BANNER

"MAN IS, ON THE WHOLE, LESS GOOD THAN HE IMAGINES HIMSELF OR WANTS TO BE."

– CARL GUSTAV JUNG
*PSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGION*


THERE ARE TWO PEOPLE IN EVERY MIRROR.
ROXXON
ROXXON

THERE'S THE ONE YOU CAN SEE.
LISTEN, IF YOU'RE GETTING SOMETHING FOR THE ROAD, MAKE IT SOMETHING HEALTHY, OKAY?
OKAY, MOM.
I MEAN IT! FRUIT JUICE! NONE OF THAT SODA POP!
OKAY, MOM.
AND THERE'S THE OTHER ONE.
GOD.
THE ONE YOU DON'T WANT TO.

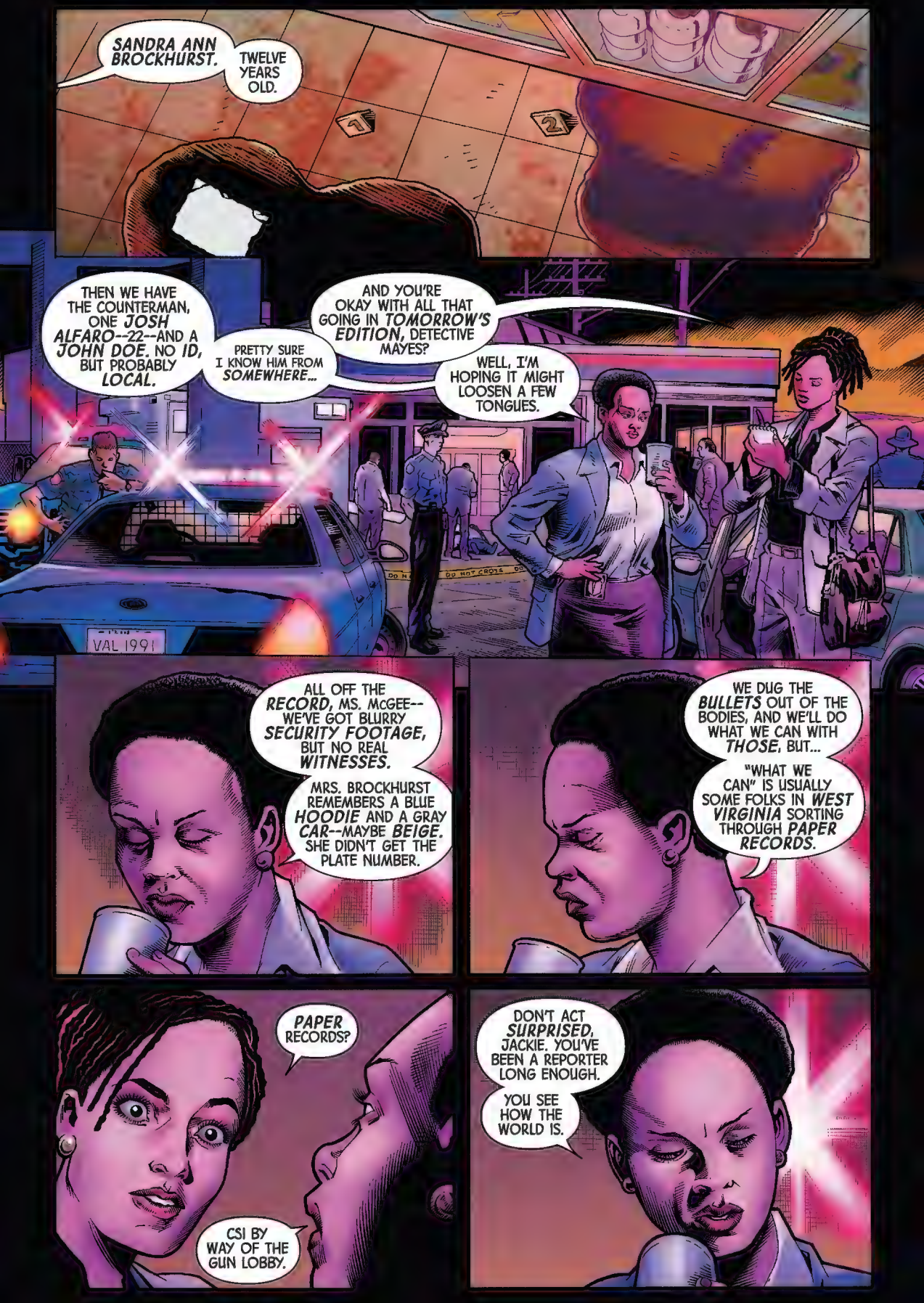
...
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?
EXCUSE ME.
CREEP.
WHAT'S HIS DEAL?
MONSTER SIGHTED:
DO THE AVENGERS KNOW?
ALIVE?
HEY.
WHICH PUMP?

MISTER?
WHICH--
OH.
N-NO ALARMS.
OPEN... OPEN THE REGISTER.
SURE-- SURE, MAN--
I JUST-- I JUST WANT WHAT'S IN THE--
KRISH

BDAM

YOU...
YOU JUST...
YOU--
BDAM
PLEASE, MAN... PLEASE--
I-- I SWEAR, I DIDN'T TOUCH THE ALARM--
...
I'M SORRY.

NO! I-- I DIDN'T SEE YOUR FACE! PLEASE!
I DIDN'T SEE ANYTH--
BDAM
SANDY?
OH LORD, SANDY--
SANDY--


SANDRA ANN BROCKHURST.
TWELVE YEARS OLD.
1
2
THEN WE HAVE THE COUNTERMAN, ONE JOSH ALFARO--22--AND A JOHN DOE. NO ID, BUT PROBABLY LOCAL.
PRETTY SURE I KNOW HIM FROM SOMEWHERE...
AND YOU'RE OKAY WITH ALL THAT GOING IN TOMORROW'S EDITION, DETECTIVE MAYES?
WELL, I'M HOPING IT MIGHT LOOSEN A FEW TONGUES.
VAL 1991
ALL OFF THE RECORD, MS. McGEE--WE'VE GOT BLURRY SECURITY FOOTAGE, BUT NO REAL WITNESSES.
MRS. BROCKHURST REMEMBERS A BLUE HOODIE AND A GRAY CAR--MAYBE BEIGE. SHE DIDN'T GET THE PLATE NUMBER.
WE DUG THE BULLETS OUT OF THE BODIES, AND WE'LL DO WHAT WE CAN WITH THOSE, BUT...
"WHAT WE CAN" IS USUALLY SOME FOLKS IN WEST VIRGINIA SORTING THROUGH PAPER RECORDS.
PAPER RECORDS?
CSI BY WAY OF THE GUN LOBBY.
DON'T ACT SURPRISED, JACKIE. YOU'VE BEEN A REPORTER LONG ENOUGH.
YOU SEE HOW THE WORLD IS.

"EVEN IF, MAYBE...
"...MAYBE YOU DON'T WANT TO."

I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT.
I JUST... I HEARD SOMETHING FALL, AND I TURNED, AND IT JUST...
...IT WENT OFF IN MY HANDS.
AND THEN I...THE OTHERS, THEY, THEY SAW ME...
I DIDN'T THINK. I SWEAR I DIDN'T THINK. I WAS SCARED, I... I PANICKED...
DOGS of HELL
I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT.
YEAH. YEAH, TOO BAD.
HOW MUCH DID YOU GET?
...
WHAT?

THE MONEY, TOMMY.
HOW MUCH DID YOU GET?
I...
I HAVEN'T COUNTED.
A...A COUPLE HUNDRED, I THINK...OH GOD...
...WHAT?
TWO HUNDRED.
GOOD.
SO YOU CAN START PAYING ME BACK.
THAT'S ABOUT THE INTEREST ON WHAT YOU OWE ME.
YOU'RE NOT A BAD GUY, TOMMY. SO...I'VE LET YOU SLIDE A LITTLE, Y'KNOW?
JUST 'CAUSE I LIKE YOU.
I LIKE YOUR WHOLE FAMILY.

YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
YEAH. YEAH, SORRY, JOE, I...I WASN'T...
H-HERE.
GOOD BOY.
HOW'S THAT GOING? THAT WHOLE SITUATION?
I...UH... WE PAID 'TIL THE END OF THE MONTH. WITH THE MONEY YOU, UH... THANK YOU...
BUT I...I COULDN'T GET THAT JOB...
I FIGURED.
...AND THERE'S NEXT MONTH, AND WE CAN'T PAY THE LIGHT BILL, AND...AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M GOING TO DO.
YOU THOUGHT ABOUT ROBBING A GAS STATION?

HAW!
I--I--
RELAX. I'M JUST HAVING A LITTLE FUN.
GET OUTTA HERE. GO GET THE REST OF MY MONEY.
NEXT TIME, DON'T BRING ME A SOB STORY WITH IT, HUH?
I MEAN IT!
YOU WANT OUT OF THIS HOLE YOU'RE IN, YOU NEED TO TOUGHEN THE HELL UP!
DON'T BE WEAK, TOMMY!
'CAUSE SOMEBODY STRONGER'N YOU IS ALWAYS GONNA COME ALONG AND--
THOOM

DAMN--
WAS THAT A BOMB, OR--
GO!
CHECK THE GENERATOR! MOVE IT!
Hell
WHAT... WHAT IN HELL COULD...
IN THE SHADOWS! SOMETHING'S MOVING!
SOMETHING'S--
EEEAAAGGH!
MIKEY?
MIKEY!
IT GOT HIM!
IT WAS JUST-- JUST THERE-- SO BIG--
IT'S THE DEVIL--
SHUT UP--
IT'S THE DEVIL, MAN!
IT'S THE DAMN KING OF HELL!

I SAID SHUT UP!
METH-HEAD &%$@^&#!
KRAK
FORM ON ME. ALL OF YOU.
WHOEVER IT IS, THEY CAN'T STAY OUT IN THE DARK FOREVER.
ANYTHING COMES THROUGH THAT DOOR, YOU UNLOAD ON--
KRUNCH
NO! NO!
AAAAHHH!
BDAM
BDAM
B-CHOOM

OH GOD--OH GOD--
BDAM BDAM
BDAM BDAM
SHOOT IT! AIM FOR THE EYES--
BDAM BDAM
IT DOESN'T DO ANYTHING!
IT DOESN'T DO ANY--
EEEAAAAHHHH!
B-CHOOM
GOD-- NO--
I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE!
B-CHOOM
I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE, YOU SON OF A BITCH! YOU'RE HIM!
YOU'RE THE--

...
HELLO?
IS...IS ANYONE... STILL...
HELLO?
ANYONE?

SANDRA ANN BROCKHURST.

THAT WAS HER NAME.

SHE WAS TWELVE.

NO.
I--I DIDN'T--DIDN'T *WANT*--
HOW'S IT FEEL IN YOUR *HAND?*
WHAT?
*HEAVY,* RIGHT? ALL THAT *STOPPING POWER.*
HEAVIER THAN IT IS AT THE *RANGE,* EVEN. YOU GO TO THE RANGE MUCH, TOMMY? SHOOT THE *PAPER TARGETS?*
IT WAS HEAVIER IN THE *GAS STATION,* I'LL BET.
WITH THE *OTHER* TARGETS.
N-*NO*-- I--
*NO?* ALL THAT POWER, RIGHT IN YOUR HAND?
THERE WASN'T SOME LITTLE PART OF YOU *WONDERING?*
WONDERING WHAT YOU COULD *DO.*
IF YOU LET THE POWER *LOOSE.*

BDAM
BDAM
BDAM
YOU KNOW.
ON SOMEONE WHO *DESERVED* IT, I MEAN.
KNOW HOW I FOUND YOU, TOMMY?
BECAUSE EVER SINCE YOU PULLED THAT TRIGGER...YOU'VE BEEN *LYING* TO YOURSELF.
AND I CAN *SMELL* A LIAR.

...
PLEASE.
I'M--I'M SORRY. I KNOW--
I KNOW WHAT I DID--
AND I KNOW, I KNOW I--I CAN NEVER--
BUT, BUT, BUT I'LL GO TO THE POLICE-- YOU--
YOU CAN TAKE ME TO THE POLICE--
I'LL TELL THEM EVERYTHING! I SWEAR TO GOD, I'LL--
--I'LL GO TO JAIL!
WHATEVER PUNISHMENT-- WHATEVER THEY DO TO ME, JUST--JUST LET ME--
AAH!
PLEASE.
I--I HAVE A FAMILY.
I HAVE A LITTLE GIRL.

YOU DON'T SAY.
I KNOW-- I KNOW, I JUST--
I DIDN'T WANT THIS! I MADE A MISTAKE!
DIDN'T YOU EVER MAKE A MISTAKE?
PLEASE-- I--I SWEAR, I'M NOT--
I'M NOT A BAD GUY.
AM I?
HNH.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

"THE BODY OF THE JOHN DOE IS *MISSING.*
"THE OTHER TWO CORPSES FROM THE GAS STATION ROBBERY ARE *UNDISTURBED,* AS FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE.
"I CAN'T SAY THE SAME FOR THE *COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE.*
"THE LOCAL CHAPTER OF THE *DOGS OF HELL* GANG WAS SQUATTING IN AN ABANDONED *HOUSING DEVELOPMENT.*
"WE KNEW THEY WERE INTO DRUGS AND ORGANIZED CRIME--PROTECTION, LOAN-SHARKING--BUT WE WANTED ENOUGH ON THEM TO MAKE A *MOVE.*
"SOMEONE ELSE MOVED *FIRST.*
"THEY'RE IN *STABLE CONDITION*--CONCUSSIONS AND FRACTURES, MOSTLY--BUT *SOMETHING* PUT THE FEAR OF GOD IN THEM. THEY'RE VERY EAGER TO *TALK* TO US."
POLICE
WHICH BRINGS US TO *THIS* GUY.
*THOMAS EDWARD HILL.*

TURNS OUT HE OWED THEM SOME MONEY.
WE FOUND HIM IN THE HOSPITAL PARKING LOT, IN A SHALLOW CRATER. LIKE A METEOR LANDED AND BROUGHT HIM ALONG.
COLLAPSED LUNG, INTERNAL BLEEDING, JUST ABOUT EVERY BONE IN HIS BODY BROKEN OR CRUSHED. UNRESPONSIVE. CLINGING TO LIFE.
HE'LL NEVER WALK AGAIN. MIGHT NEVER WAKE UP AGAIN.
GOD...
THERE'S MORE. THAT GAS STATION ROBBERY?
HE DID IT.
THE MURDER WEAPON WAS LYING NEXT TO HIM--MATCHES THE CASINGS AT THE SCENE. WE'VE GOT HIS PRINTS, TOO.
PLUS, A COUPLE OF THE DOGS HEARD HIM CONFESS.
BUT THEY DIDN'T DO THIS...
ON THE RECORD? THE ASSAILANT IS UNKNOWN.
OFF THE RECORD...
I'M ONLY SAYING THIS BECAUSE...PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW. YOU SHOULD KNOW. BUT THIS NEVER CAME FROM ME.
THAT "SOMEONE" WHO ATTACKED THE DOGS TONIGHT...
HE WAS BIG.
"BUILT LIKE AN ENGINE OF HELL," I QUOTE. AND...
AND HE WAS GREEN.
UNDERSTAND?

IT...
IT COULD BE ONE OF THE OTHERS...
NO.
NOT THIS.
HE'S DEAD.
THERE WAS AN AUTOPSY, A FUNERAL... BRUCE BANNER IS DEAD, GLORIA.
YES. YES, HE IS.
AND SO WAS THE JOHN DOE IN THE GAS STATION. WITH THAT FAMILIAR FACE.
HE WAS DEAD.
AND THEN THE SUN WENT DOWN.
SEE...I DON'T THINK THERE WAS A COVER-UP. I DON'T THINK IT WAS A LIE.
BRUCE BANNER WAS DEAD. BRUCE BANNER CAN DIE.
BUT THEN... THERE'S THAT OTHER GUY.
I...
I HAVE TO TALK TO MY EDITOR.
YEAH, YOU DO.

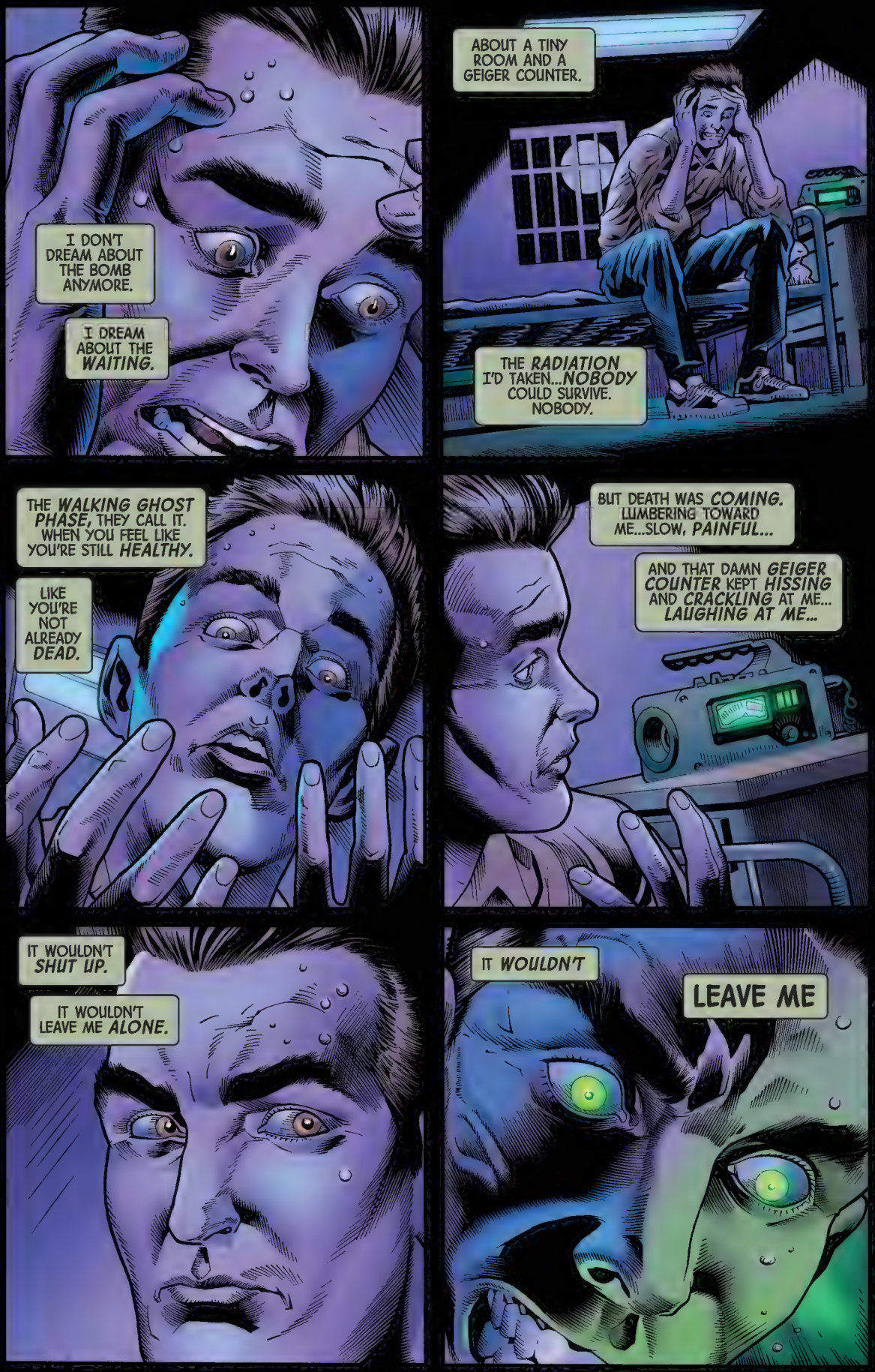
THERE ARE TWO PEOPLE IN EVERY MIRROR.
...
I'M...
...I'M NOT A BAD PERSON.
AM I?

OR IS HE BOTH

2

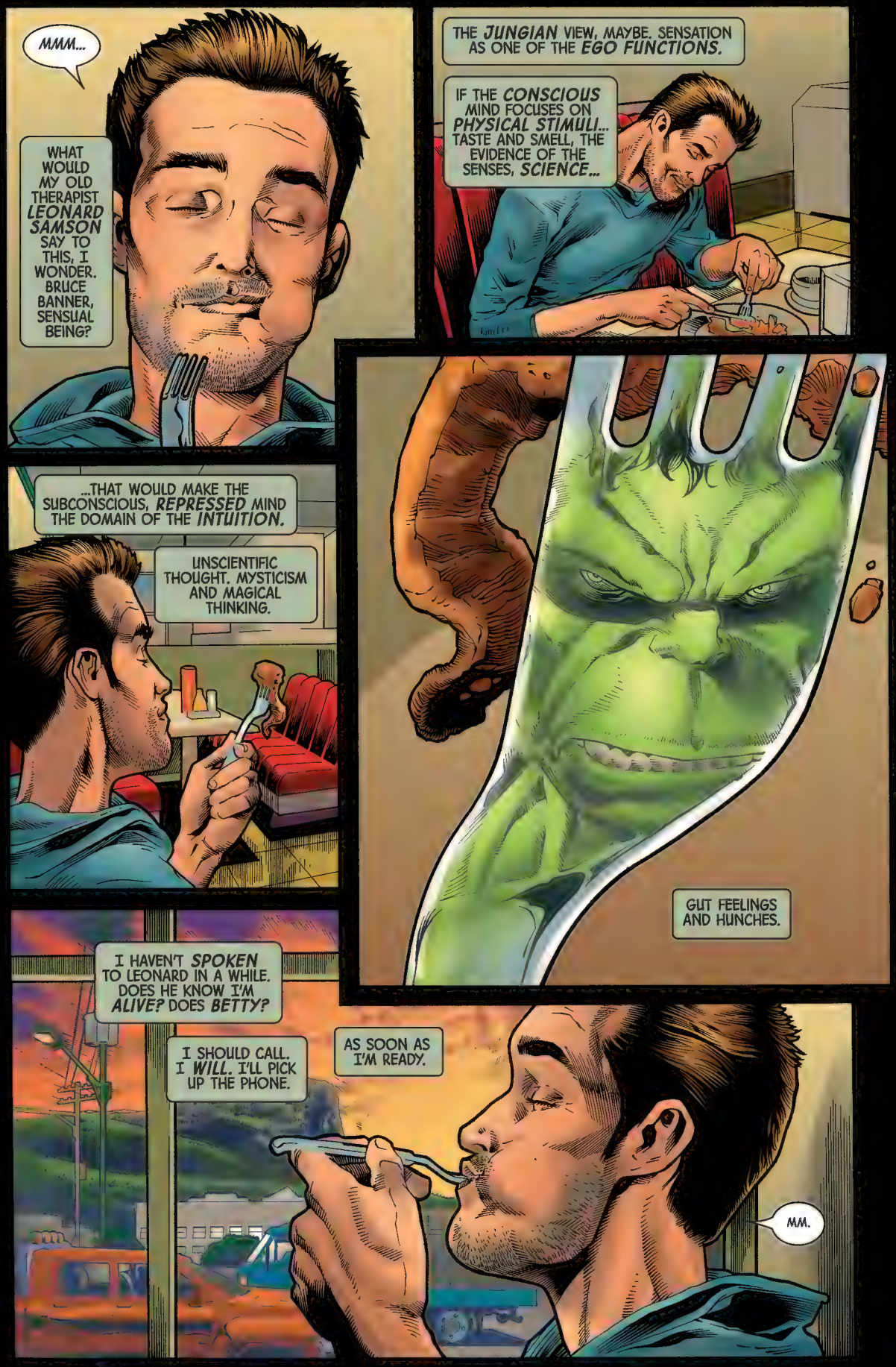
"ALL THAT A MAN HATH WILL HE GIVE FOR HIS LIFE."

– JOB 2:4


I DON'T DREAM ABOUT THE BOMB ANYMORE.
I DREAM ABOUT THE WAITING.
ABOUT A TINY ROOM AND A GEIGER COUNTER.
THE RADIATION I'D TAKEN...NOBODY COULD SURVIVE. NOBODY.
THE WALKING GHOST PHASE, THEY CALL IT. WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE STILL HEALTHY.
LIKE YOU'RE NOT ALREADY DEAD.
BUT DEATH WAS COMING. LUMBERING TOWARD ME...SLOW, PAINFUL...
AND THAT DAMN GEIGER COUNTER KEPT HISSING AND CRACKLING AT ME... LAUGHING AT ME...
IT WOULDN'T SHUT UP.
IT WOULDN'T LEAVE ME ALONE.
IT WOULDN'T
LEAVE ME

ALONE.
DID I SAY THAT OUT LOUD?
DOESN'T MATTER. THE BUS IS MOSTLY EMPTY.
NOBODY TO GIVE A FITFULLY SLEEPING STRANGER A SECOND LOOK.
BUT...I'VE HAD THE SAME DREAM THREE NIGHTS RUNNING NOW. THERE'S PROBABLY A MESSAGE THERE.
I SHOULD STOP SLEEPING. OR AT LEAST STOP SLEEPING AT NIGHT.
THE NIGHT IS HIS TIME.
THE BUS PULLS INTO THE STOP. A SMALL TOWN--I DON'T EVEN CATCH THE NAME.
BUT THERE'S AN ITCH IN MY SKULL, AND MY SEAT IS NO LONGER COMFORTABLE.
MESSAGE RECEIVED.

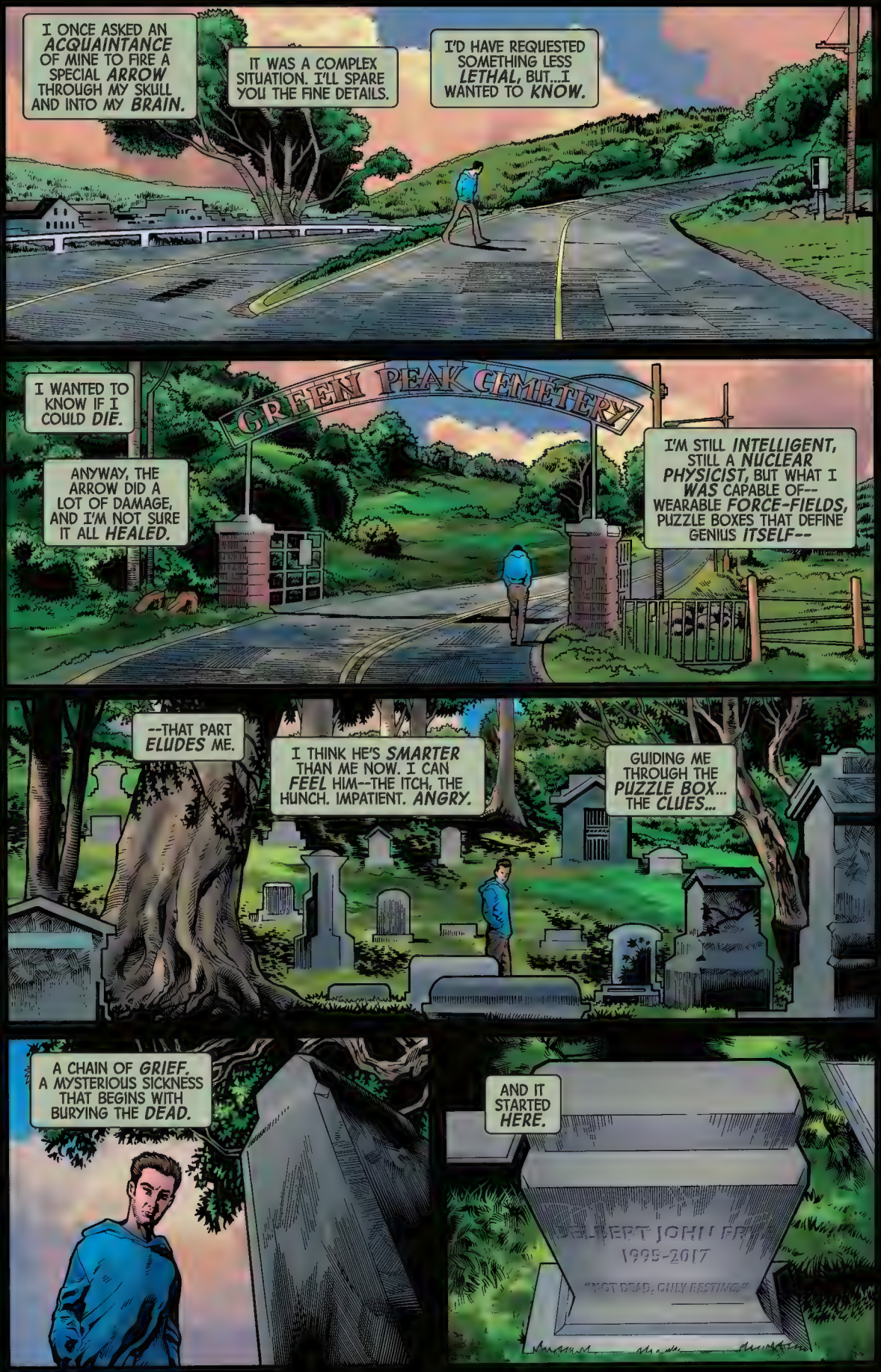
MY NAME IS BRUCE BANNER, AND MY LIFE IS VERY SIMPLE.
I DON'T OWN THINGS.
THE CLOTHES ON MY BACK I'LL KEEP AS LONG AS I CAN--BUT THEY WON'T LAST. THEY NEVER DO.
ANY MONEY I EARN, BEG OR STEAL IS USED UP QUICKLY, IF IT'S NOT ABANDONED WITH MY CLOTHES.
BUS TICKETS. A BED AND A SHOWER, WHEN I CAN AFFORD THEM. A HOT MEAL NOW AND THEN.
BUSCEMA'S
SIMPLE PLEASURES.
TWO EGGS, SUNNY-SIDE UP?
THANK YOU.
SMELLS GOOD.
SALT ON THE WHITE, PEPPER ON THE YOLK...LINGERING GOLD, OOZING ON THE TONGUE...
MY FIVE SENSES ARE ALL I TRULY HAVE.
I TRY TO APPRECIATE THEM.
MMHH.


MMM...
WHAT WOULD MY OLD THERAPIST LEONARD SAMSON SAY TO THIS, I WONDER. BRUCE BANNER, SENSUAL BEING?
THE JUNGIAN VIEW, MAYBE. SENSATION AS ONE OF THE EGO FUNCTIONS.
IF THE CONSCIOUS MIND FOCUSES ON PHYSICAL STIMULI... TASTE AND SMELL, THE EVIDENCE OF THE SENSES, SCIENCE...
...THAT WOULD MAKE THE SUBCONSCIOUS, REPRESSED MIND THE DOMAIN OF THE INTUITION.
UNSCIENTIFIC THOUGHT. MYSTICISM AND MAGICAL THINKING.
GUT FEELINGS AND HUNCHES.
I HAVEN'T SPOKEN TO LEONARD IN A WHILE. DOES HE KNOW I'M ALIVE? DOES BETTY?
I SHOULD CALL. I WILL. I'LL PICK UP THE PHONE.
AS SOON AS I'M READY.
MM.

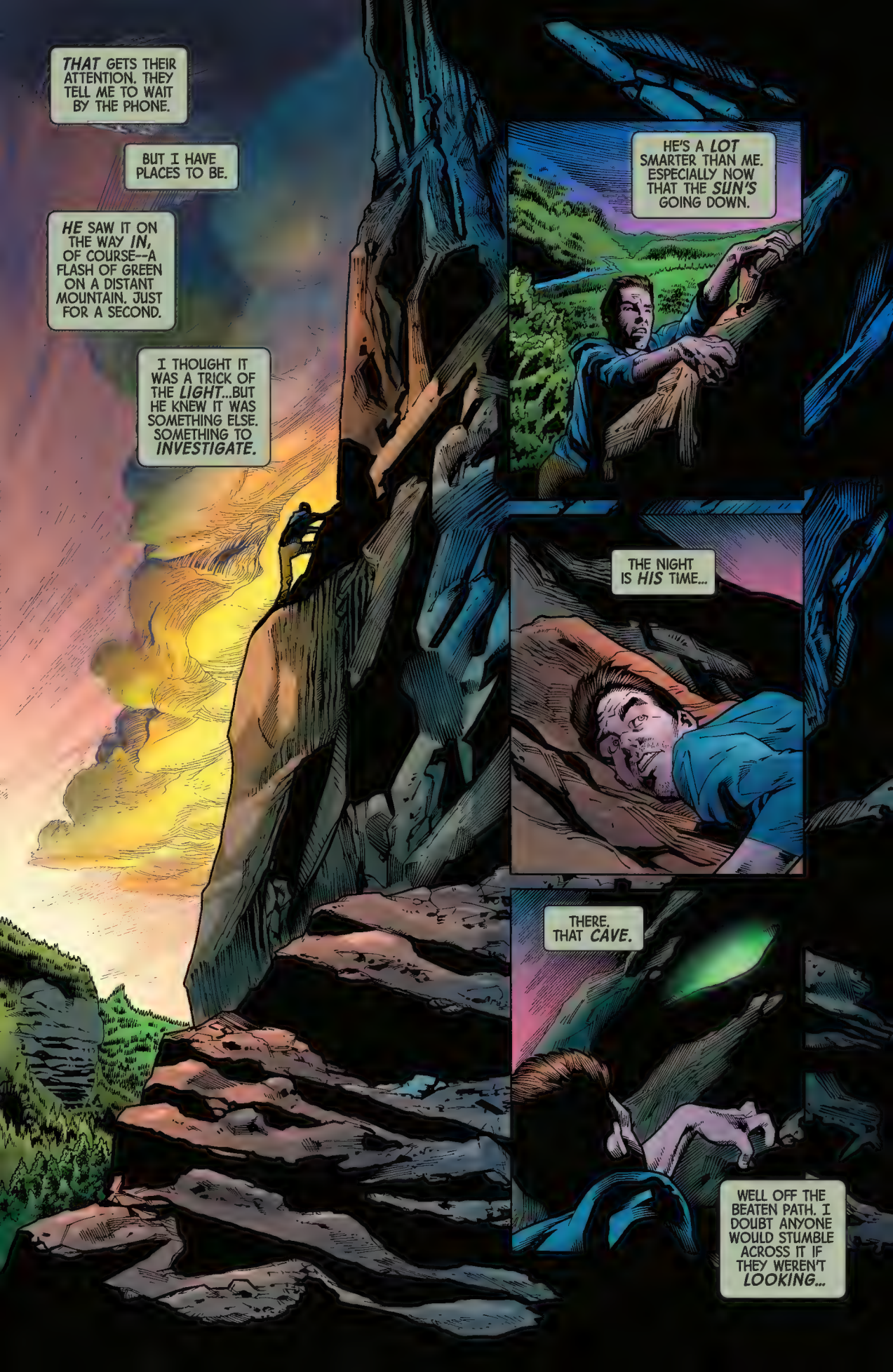
BUT FOR NOW... MY LIFE IS VERY SIMPLE.
I WALK THE EARTH. AND I LOOK FOR WAYS TO USE THE POWER INSIDE ME.
WAYS TO USE...HIM... TO BRING A MEASURE OF JUSTICE INTO THIS WORLD.
WAYS TO ATONE FOR MY SINS.
NOW
TURANGO LOCAL PRESS
UNFORTUNATELY, I'M STARTING TO GET NOTICED.
DAILY BUGLE
HULK SIGHTED!
A REPORTER NAMED McGEE PUT ME ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE ARIZONA HERALD-- NOW EVERYONE'S ASKING QUESTIONS.
"IS BRUCE BANNER ALIVE? ARE THEY COVERING IT UP?" AND SO ON.
IT'S A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE SOMEONE OF AUTHORITY DECIDES THEY HAVE TO--
WAIT. THE LOCAL PAPER...
THE ITCH IS BACK. BUZZING IN MY SKULL. INTRUSIVE.
A HUNCH.
TURANGO
LOCAL PRESS
MAYOR: MYSTERY DEATHS ARE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT!
A GUT FEELING.

I DECIDE TO ASK SOME QUESTIONS.
YEAH, THE MAYOR'S RIGHT.
SERIOUSLY, IT'S NOTHING. JUST A...WHADDYACALLIT... STATISTICAL THING OR SOMETHING...
Heineken
PFFT. I'LL TELL YOU WHAT IT IS.
IT'S GRIEF.
AW, DON'T START, ROY.
I'M TELLING YOU. I KNOW FOUR PEOPLE FELL TO THIS THING--SAME PATTERN ALL AROUND.
THEY LOSE SOMEONE. THEY BURY THEM. THEY FALL INTO GRIEF.
THEN THE SICKNESS COMES TO THEM. LIKE A CHAIN OF SICKNESS... A CHAIN OF GRIEF...
WHOLE TOWN'LL BE GRIEVIN' PRETTY SOON. THEN WHAT?
IT'S THIS THEORY HE'S GOT.
YOU SHOULDN'T BUG THE CLIENTELE WITH THAT STUFF, ROY--
WHEN DO YOU THINK IT STARTED? THIS... CHAIN OF GRIEF?
WELL, NOW, THAT'S EASY.
WHEN THE FRYE BOY DIED.

ROY...
WHEN THAT BOY DIED, SOMETHING DARK LANDED ON THIS TOWN.
I'M TELLING YOU.
THE FRYE BOY?
DEL FRYE. PROM KING, STAR QUARTERBACK...I MEAN, BASICALLY HE WAS THE COLLEGE TEAM...
HANG ON, I'VE GOT A PHOTO SOMEWHERE...
THAT'S HIM.
...
HOW DID HE DIE?
EMBOLISM OR SOMETHING. JUST KEELED OVER AND DIED.
NICE KID. I MEAN, HE HAD LOOKS, HE WAS EVERYBODY'S HERO... THE WHOLE TOWN LOVED HIM, BUT HE NEVER LET IT GO TO HIS HEAD.
HE WAS RICH, TOO. HIS FATHER WAS A DOCTOR-- INVENTED SOMETHING, OR MADE IT BETTER, SOMETHING LIKE THAT...WHAT WAS IT...?
SOME KIND OF MEDICAL TREATMENT...CANCER TREATMENT...
RADIATION TREATMENT.
THE ITCH RETURNS, FOCUSED ON A SINGLE POINT.
RIGHT WHERE THE ARROW WENT IN.


I ONCE ASKED AN ACQUAINTANCE OF MINE TO FIRE A SPECIAL ARROW THROUGH MY SKULL AND INTO MY BRAIN.
IT WAS A COMPLEX SITUATION. I'LL SPARE YOU THE FINE DETAILS.
I'D HAVE REQUESTED SOMETHING LESS LETHAL, BUT...I WANTED TO KNOW.
I WANTED TO KNOW IF I COULD DIE.
ANYWAY, THE ARROW DID A LOT OF DAMAGE, AND I'M NOT SURE IT ALL HEALED.
GREEN PEAK CEMETERY
I'M STILL INTELLIGENT, STILL A NUCLEAR PHYSICIST, BUT WHAT I WAS CAPABLE OF-- WEARABLE FORCE-FIELDS, PUZZLE BOXES THAT DEFINE GENIUS ITSELF--
--THAT PART ELUDES ME.
I THINK HE'S SMARTER THAN ME NOW. I CAN FEEL HIM--THE ITCH, THE HUNCH. IMPATIENT. ANGRY.
GUIDING ME THROUGH THE PUZZLE BOX... THE CLUES...
A CHAIN OF GRIEF. A MYSTERIOUS SICKNESS THAT BEGINS WITH BURYING THE DEAD.
AND IT STARTED HERE.
1995-2017
"NOT DEAD, ONLY RESTING."

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THIS PLACE. IN THE AIR AND SOIL. SOMETHING I RECOGNIZE.
SOMETHING I DON'T WANT TO.
OH, NO.
NO, NO, NO...
SOMETHING THAT'S PART OF ME.
GAMMA RADIATION. EMANATING FROM THAT GRAVE.
ANYONE VISITING HERE IS IN DANGER. ACUTE RADIATION SYNDROME--IT'D LOOK LIKE THE FLU AT FIRST, FOOD POISONING--
--BUT THEN THE WHITE BLOOD CELLS DIE OFF, YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM SHUTS DOWN--
IT'S CALLED THE WALKING GHOST PHASE.
NO, I DON'T HAVE EXACT READINGS--I TOLD YOU, I CAN'T GIVE MY NAME--
THEY DON'T BELIEVE ME. WHY WOULD THEY? I'M SOME IDIOT CALLING FROM A PAY PHONE.
AND THE E.P.A. WON'T SEND A RADIOLOGICAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM FOR JUST ANYONE.
FINE. FINE. YOU WANT MY NAME?
MY NAME...IS ROBERT BRUCE BANNER.
DON'T MAKE ME ANGRY.


THAT GETS THEIR ATTENTION. THEY TELL ME TO WAIT BY THE PHONE.
BUT I HAVE PLACES TO BE.
HE SAW IT ON THE WAY IN, OF COURSE--A FLASH OF GREEN ON A DISTANT MOUNTAIN. JUST FOR A SECOND.
I THOUGHT IT WAS A TRICK OF THE LIGHT...BUT HE KNEW IT WAS SOMETHING ELSE. SOMETHING TO INVESTIGATE.
HE'S A LOT SMARTER THAN ME. ESPECIALLY NOW THAT THE SUN'S GOING DOWN.
THE NIGHT IS HIS TIME...
THERE. THAT CAVE.
WELL OFF THE BEATEN PATH. I DOUBT ANYONE WOULD STUMBLE ACROSS IT IF THEY WEREN'T LOOKING...

...BUT THEN AGAIN, I COULD BE WRONG.
I'M SORRY
...AH.
DR FRYE, I PRESUME.
I'M SO SORRY
BUT I CAN'T LET ANYONE FIND ME

WAIT-- HHKK--
SOME TIME AGO I ASKED AN ACQUAINTANCE TO SHOOT ME IN THE HEAD WITH A SPECIAL ARROW.
I WANTED TO KNOW IF I COULD DIE.
AND I CAN.
I'M SORRY
KRAKK
I- I'M
BUT HE CAN'T.
OFF!

OH MY GOD... Y-YOU'RE HIM...
YOU'RE DOCTOR BANNER...
ARE YOU TRYING TO PISS ME OFF?
I-- I--
YOUR KID-- WHAT WAS HIS NAME, DEL? IT STARTED WITH HIM, DIDN'T IT?
AND DON'T LIE, FRYE.
I CAN SMELL A LIAR.
I WAS AFRAID OF DEATH.
"IT'S STRANGE. I NEVER REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT DEATH UNTIL AFTER CLAIRE DIED MY WIFE.
"I THOUGHT ABOUT WHERE SHE MIGHT BE... THE AFTERLIFE I'D BEEN TAUGHT TO ACCEPT... AND I COULDN'T IMAGINE IT.
"I JUST COULDN'T.

"AND I BEGAN TO THINK ABOUT WHAT DEATH REALLY *WAS*.

"AN UNIMAGINABLE *ABSENCE*. A TOTAL CESSATION OF BEING.

"ALL THE JOYS OF *TOUCH* AND *TASTE* AND *SMELL*, OF *THOUGHT*, EVEN THE *MEMORY* OF THOUGHT--*GONE*.

"UTTERLY.

"IT WAS LIKE STARING INTO SOME TERRIFYING *ABYSS*.

"AND MY *SON*, MY PERFECT SON, WAS *HE* AT THE EDGE OF THAT ABYSS AS WELL? CONDEMNED TO *NOTHING*?

"I THREW MYSELF INTO WORK. *MY* WORK, BASED ON *YOUR* WORK.

"EVERYONE SAW YOU AS A *CAUTIONARY TALE*--NOT ME. TO *ME*, YOU WERE A PROMISE OF *HOPE*.

"A MAN DEATH COULD NOT *CLAIM*.

"I MADE SOME MINOR IMPROVEMENTS TO CONVENTIONAL *CANCER TREATMENTS*. THAT WAS GOOD, USEFUL WORK. IT PAID THE *BILLS*.

"BUT THE *REAL* WORK...

"THAT, I KEPT TO *MYSELF*.

"HUMAN TESTING BEGAN WITH ME--AND IT WENT PERFECTLY.
"A MONTH AFTER THE INITIAL INJECTION, I FELT TEN YEARS YOUNGER--WITH A GAMMA-POWERED HEALING FACTOR AND NO SIDE EFFECTS..."
SO THEN YOU GAVE SOME TO YOUR SON.
"I HAD TO. HE WAS GOING PRO AND--THE INJURIES YOU GET PLAYING FOOTBALL. CONCUSSIONS. BRAIN DAMAGE...
"I COULDN'T WAIT.
DAD...?
YOU'LL FEEL DIZZY FOR A MOMENT. BUT IT PASSES.
YOU'LL--
DAD... I...I CAN SEE...
DEL?
I CAN SEE A DOOR.
A...A GREEN DOOR... AND...
AND THERE'S SOMEONE LOOKING THROUGH IT.

IT'S--IT'S BELOW US--
HUUURK--!
I'LL--I'LL GET HELP--
HELP ME! SOMEBODY HELP!
DEL, HOLD ON-- HOLD ON--
BELOW EVERYTHING
DEL?
"BUT HE WAS ALREADY DEAD IN SECONDS.
"I'D KILLED HIM.
"IT WAS SEEN AS A RANDOM TRAGEDY. I BURNED THE SERUM, DESTROYED MY NOTES. NOBODY SUSPECTED. I DIDN'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO CONFESS.
"I COULDN'T TALK TO ANYONE. COULDN'T LOOK AT ANYONE. COULDN'T LEAVE THE HOUSE.
"SO WHEN THE CHANGE STARTED, I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO SAW."

YEAH. I GOT IT FROM HERE.
YOU HID, IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE. AND-- IN BETWEEN OFFING ANYONE WHO FOUND YOU--
--YOU'VE BEEN SITTING HERE WONDERING WHY.
DON'T ASK ME ABOUT THE SCIENCE. SCIENCE IS THE OTHER GUY.
MAYBE YOU BUILT UP A TOLERANCE-- ALL THAT GAMMA WORK. YOU DIDN'T GET THE FULL EFFECT UNTIL TOO LATE.
YOUR OWN WALKING GHOST PHASE.
ME? I LOOK FOR IRONY.
YOU, YOU'RE AFRAID OF DEATH-- NOW YOU ARE DEATH.
YOU LOVE YOUR SON? YOU PUT HIM IN A GRAVE.
OH GOD...
YEAH.
NOW YOU GET IT.
"HE'S RADIOACTIVE. JUST LIKE YOU ARE, FRYE. DADDY'S LITTLE BOY.
"AND SIX FEET OF EARTH ISN'T ENOUGH TO CONTAIN THAT.

"EVERYONE WHO GETS IN RANGE--TO MOURN--COULD WALK AWAY WITH A FATAL DOSE. WALKING GHOSTS.
"AND THEN SOMEONE HAS TO MOURN THEM..."
A CHAIN OF GRIEF.
HOW MANY, DR. FRYE?
HOW MANY BECAUSE YOU WERE SCARED?
PLEASE-- I--I MADE MISTAKES-- BUT--
--BUT I DON'T WANT TO DIE--
IS THAT SO?
WELL, YOU MADE YOUR BED, FRYE.
TIME TO LIE IN IT.

WHAT...?
OH GOD.
OH GOD, NO.
DEATH IS BETTER!
NO!
NOT THIS! PLEASE!
I DON'T WANT THIS! THE ABYSS, THE NOTHING--- IT'D BE BETTER THAN THIS!
*PLEASE!

# THE WALKING GHOST

3

"AND IN THE LOWEST
DEEP A LOWER DEEP,
STILL THREAT'NING TO
DEVOUR ME, OPENS WIDE..."

– JOHN MILTON
*PARADISE LOST*

SOUTH DAKOTA.
JACKIE McGEE.
I'M A REPORTER FOR THE ARIZONA HERALD. WE SPOKE ON THE PHONE?
FIRST OFF, THANKS FOR AGREEING TO SEE ME.
I DON'T KNOW IF ANY OTHER REPORTERS HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU ABOUT THE EVENTS ON MERCER AVENUE...
...BUT FROM WHAT I'VE GATHERED, YOU WERE AN EYEWITNESS FOR AT LEAST ONE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE.
YOU WERE THERE.
AND I'D LIKE TO HEAR IT FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW.
GLK

THE COP.

WELL, LITTLE LADY--

--HAVE I GOT A STORY FOR YOU!

"SUNDOWN! AND CRIME LURKS WITH THE TWILIGHT--AT THE OLD CHURCH ON MERCER AVENUE!

"A HOSTAGE SITUATION, THEY SAID--PERP WITH A GUN, HOLDING A PRIEST AND A HELPLESS OLD LADY!

"EXCEPT THIS PERP WAS ONE LOU LEMBERT--

HANDS WHERE WE CAN SEE 'EM, PUNK!

"--A NO-GOOD JUVENILE DELINQUENT WHO'D CAUGHT A DOSE OF GAMMA RAYS-- THAT MADE HIM SOMETHING MORE THAN HUMAN!

PATHETIC FOOLS! YOU'LL SEE MY HANDS, ALL RIGHT...

THE HANDS OF--

HOTSHOT!

"HE WASN'T PACKING A GUN-- HE WAS ONE!

THE HUMAN RAY GUN!

WZZZZP

BLUE BLAZES! MY SIDEARM!

ZRAAK

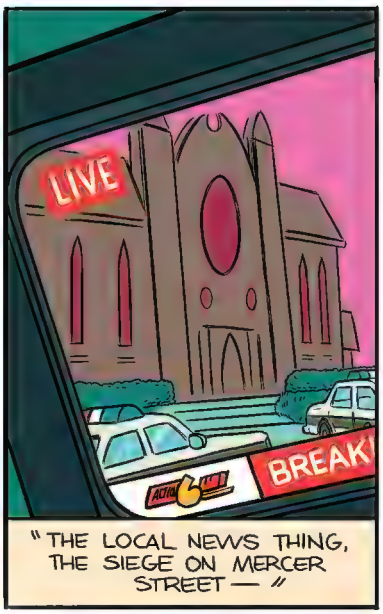
ZRRAK

"AND BOY HOWDY, HE KNEW HOW TO USE IT!"

WE NEEDED THE CALL TO GO FORTH, PILGRIM--WE NEEDED A HERO TO ASSEMBLE!

AND BLUE BLAZES, WE SURE GOT ONE!

THE BARTENDER.
I MEAN, I'M NOT A BAD PERSON OR ANYTHING.
CAN I USE THE RESTROOM, PLEASE?
"BUT WHAT WAS I GONNA DO?
"HIS CLOTHES DIDN'T EVEN FIT HIM.
"THEY LOOKED LIKE SOMEONE DIED IN THEM.
"AND HE LOOKED LIKE A SERIAL KILLER."
I MEAN, HE WAS AT LEAST GOING TO SHOOT UP IN THERE.
RIGHT?
"ANYWAY, THINGS GOT PRETTY HEATED.
GO!
I KNOW MY
"I GUESS, LOOKING BACK, I DODGED A BULLET.
"ANYWAY.
EH?
"THAT WAS WHEN HE SAW THE TV.




"THE LOCAL NEWS THING, THE SIEGE ON MERCER STREET — "

MERCER ***AVENUE***. WHATEVER.

BUT THE NEXT THING I KNOW, HE'S LUNGING TOWARD THIS COUPLE EATING—

"— GRABS A ***KNIFE*** OFF THE BAR — "

AND OBVIOUSLY I'M LIKE —

***WHOA***

"BUT HE JUST RUNS OUT THE DOOR."

SNIFF

I MEAN, OBVIOUSLY I DIDN'T KNOW WHO HE ***WAS***.

THE OLD LADY.
NO, I DIDN'T KNOW THE YOUNG MAN.
HE WAS SO HANDSOME, THOUGH!
"SUCH A TRAGEDY.
"I REMEMBER THINKING HE LOOKED LIKE JAMES DEAN. SUCH A NICE YOUNG MAN.
"I WAS A DEANIAC WHEN I WAS A GIRL..."
PLEASE, FATHER... I NEED YOUR HELP!
MY GIRL, JESS--I LOVE HER, FATHER! MORE THAN I CAN SAY!
BUT SHE'S... DYING!
WE--WE NEED...
...THE LAST RITES!

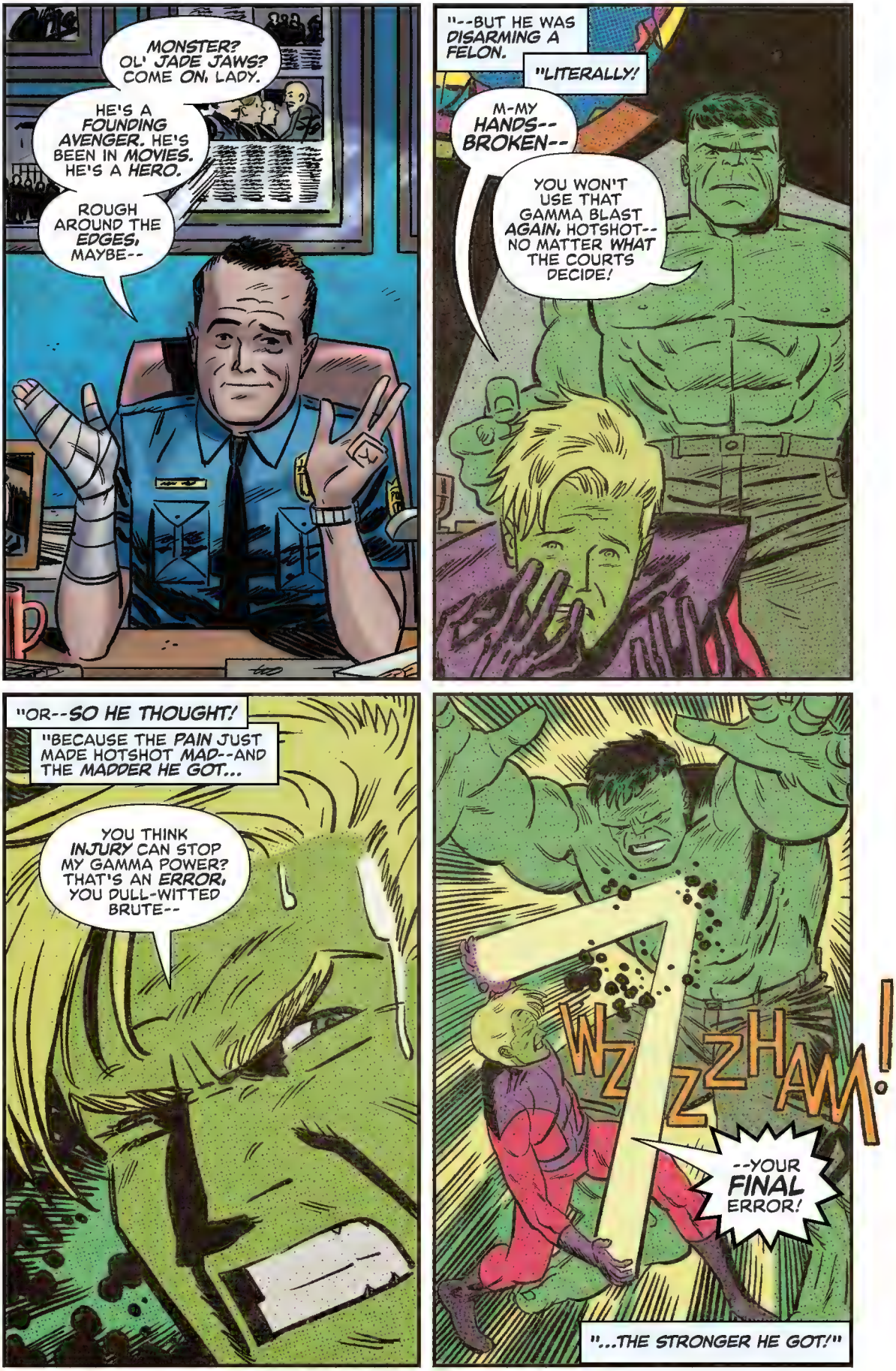
THE LAST RITES?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT. MY HEARING ISN'T WHAT IT WAS, I'M AFRAID.
I--I NEVER BELIEVED IN THAT STUFF BEFORE! NONE OF IT! BUT NOW...
NOW ALL I WANT IS TO KNOW HER IMMORTAL SOUL IS SAVED! WILL YOU HELP ME, FATHER?
SON-- YOU BROKE IN DURING A SERVICE!
YOU'VE TAKEN HOSTAGES!
I'M SURE THE POLICE WILL UNDERSTAND IF YOU JUST--
THEY'L NEVER UNDERSTAND, FATHER!
NOBODY UNDERSTANDS! NOBODY IN THIS WHOLE DAMNED WORLD!
NOBODY UNDERSTANDS...
...LOVE!
...
HE REALLY DID LOOK JUST LIKE JAMES DEAN.

THE PRIEST.
HE... HE LOOKED LIKE SOMETHING FROM A HORROR MOVIE.
HIS SKIN WAS GREEN. AND GREASY... LIKE HE HADN'T SLEPT IN DAYS...
THERE WAS A SMELL COMING FROM HIM.
"LIKE...URINE AND COBWEBS.
THE DEVIL, FATHER.
THE DEVIL'S IN HER.
G-GET AWAY FROM ME--
OR SOMETHING. SOMETHING LIKE THE DEVIL.
SOMETHING UNDERNEATH... BELOW EVERYTHING...
YOU'RE NOT LISTENING!
THE ONE BELOW! IT GOT INTO HER SOMEHOW!
WE NEED AN EXORCISM. SHE NEEDS ONE.
"I WAS TERRIFIED. I'D JUST SEEN THIS--THIS MUTANT SHOOT FIRE FROM HIS FINGERS.
"NOW THOSE FINGERS WERE NEXT TO MY FACE--
SEE, THERE'S THIS--THIS DOOR, TO THE BELOW-PLACE-- LIKE A GREEN DOOR--
"--AND HE WAS INSANE.
"QUITE INSANE.

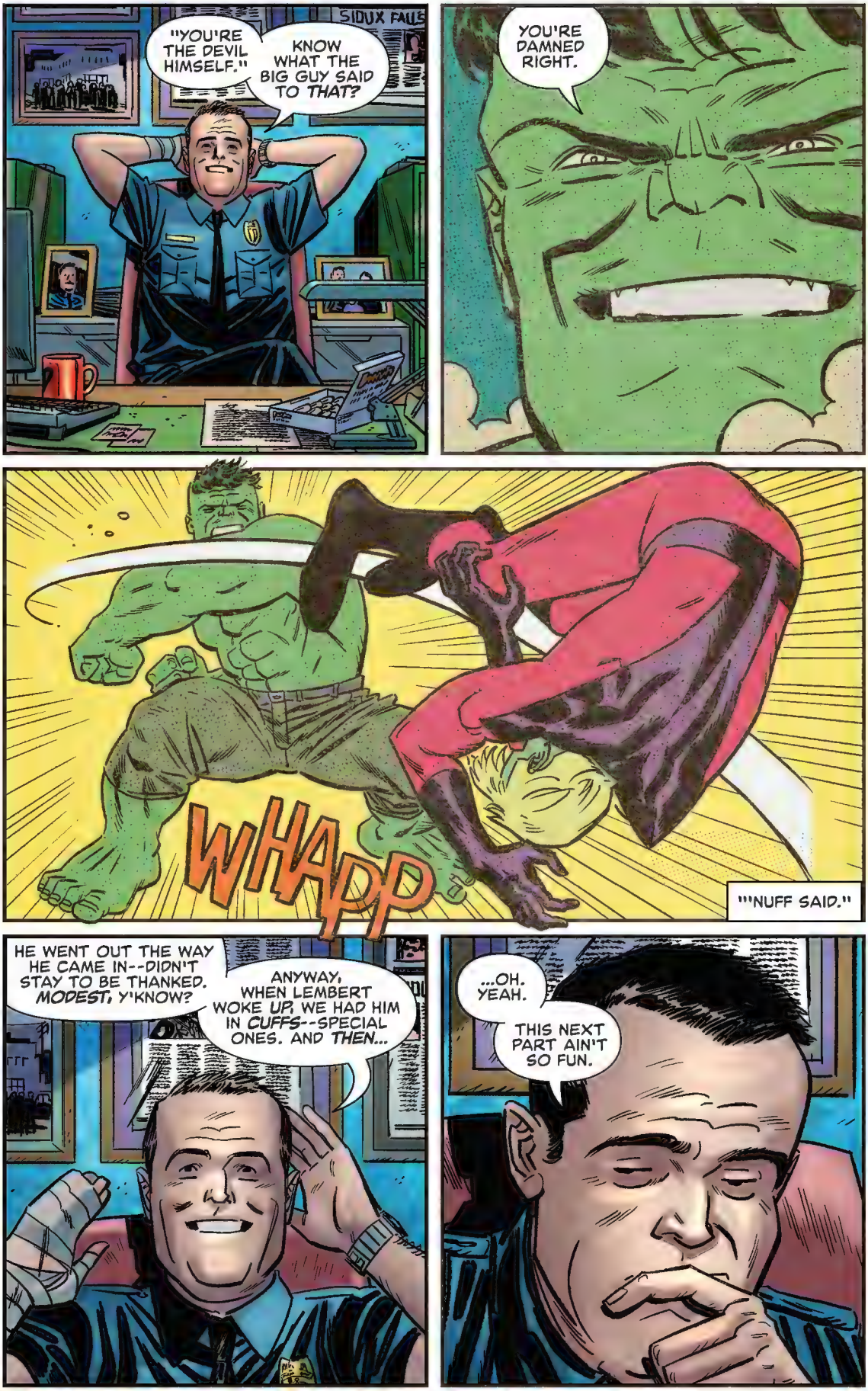
"AND HE WAS GOING TO KILL ME. AND OLD MRS. MELROSE.
I'VE SEEN IT IN DREAMS.
I KNOW HOW THAT SOUNDS.
JUST...
"AND THE POLICE.
...JUST KEEP CALM, OKAY?
WE'LL GET SOMEONE TO NEGOTIATE...
DISPATCH--WE NEED BACKUP--
NO! NO NEGOTIATING, NO MORE COPS--YOU THINK I'M STUPID?
JUST LISTEN TO ME!
"SO I PRAYED.
"I PRAYED TO GOD ABOVE FOR SALVATION--FOR DELIVERANCE.
"AND...THIS WILL SOUND STRANGE. AFTER ALL, MY PRAYERS WERE ANSWERED.
"BUT THAT ANSWER... WHAT WAS SENT TO DELIVER ME..."
WHY WON'T YOU LISTEN TO ME?
WHY WON'T YOU JUST--
--JUST HELP ME--

KRSHH
...I DON'T THINK IT WAS SENT BY GOD.

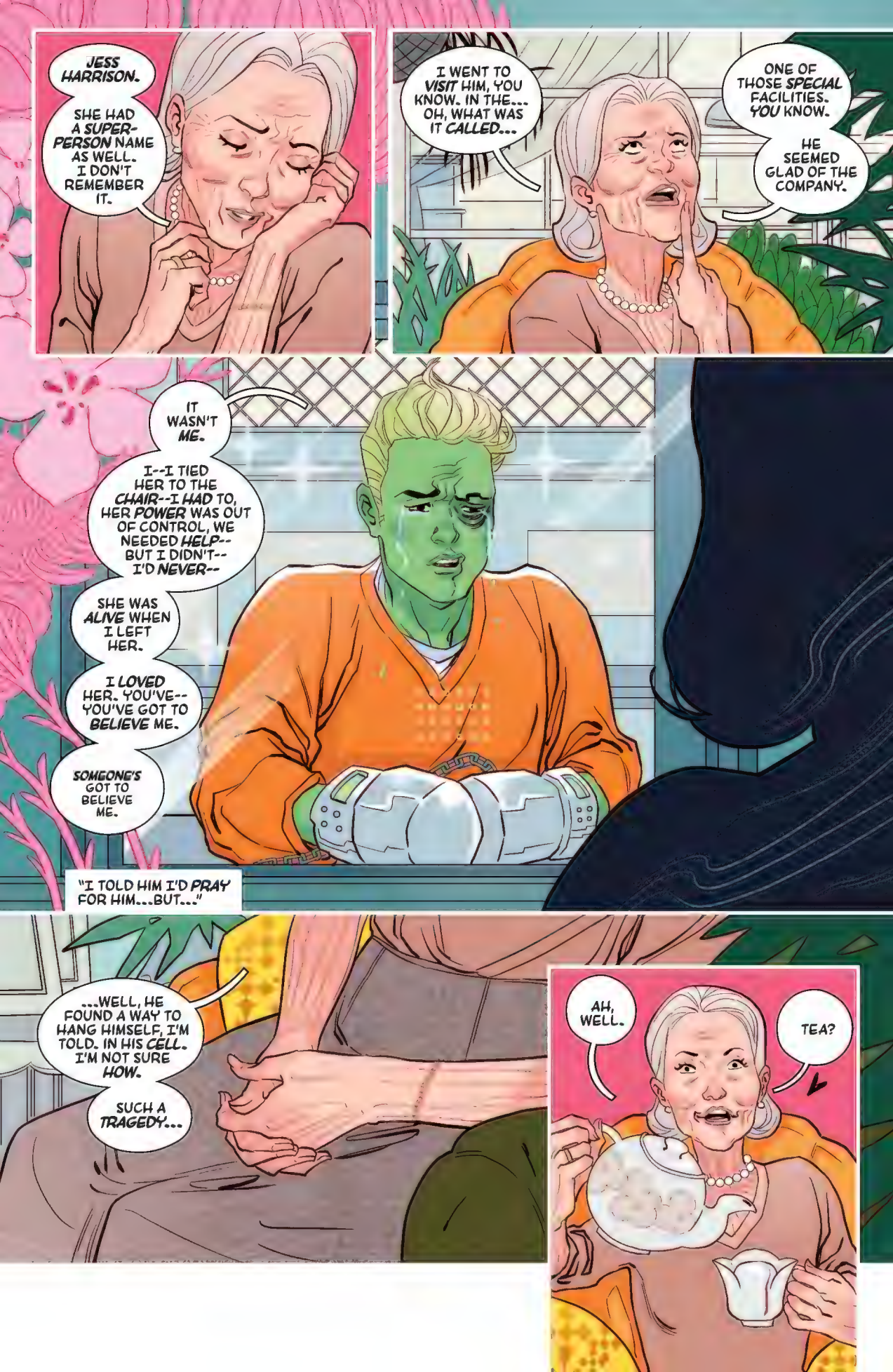
OH, IT WAS HORRIBLE. HORRIBLE.
SUCH A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN--ALL ALONE AGAINST THAT--
N-NO! STAY BACK!
"--THAT...
HUURRRHH
RRUURGH
MY GIRL-- MY GIRL NEEDS ME!
I'M BEGGING YOU--
KRA AKK
AAAAH!
"...THAT MONSTER."

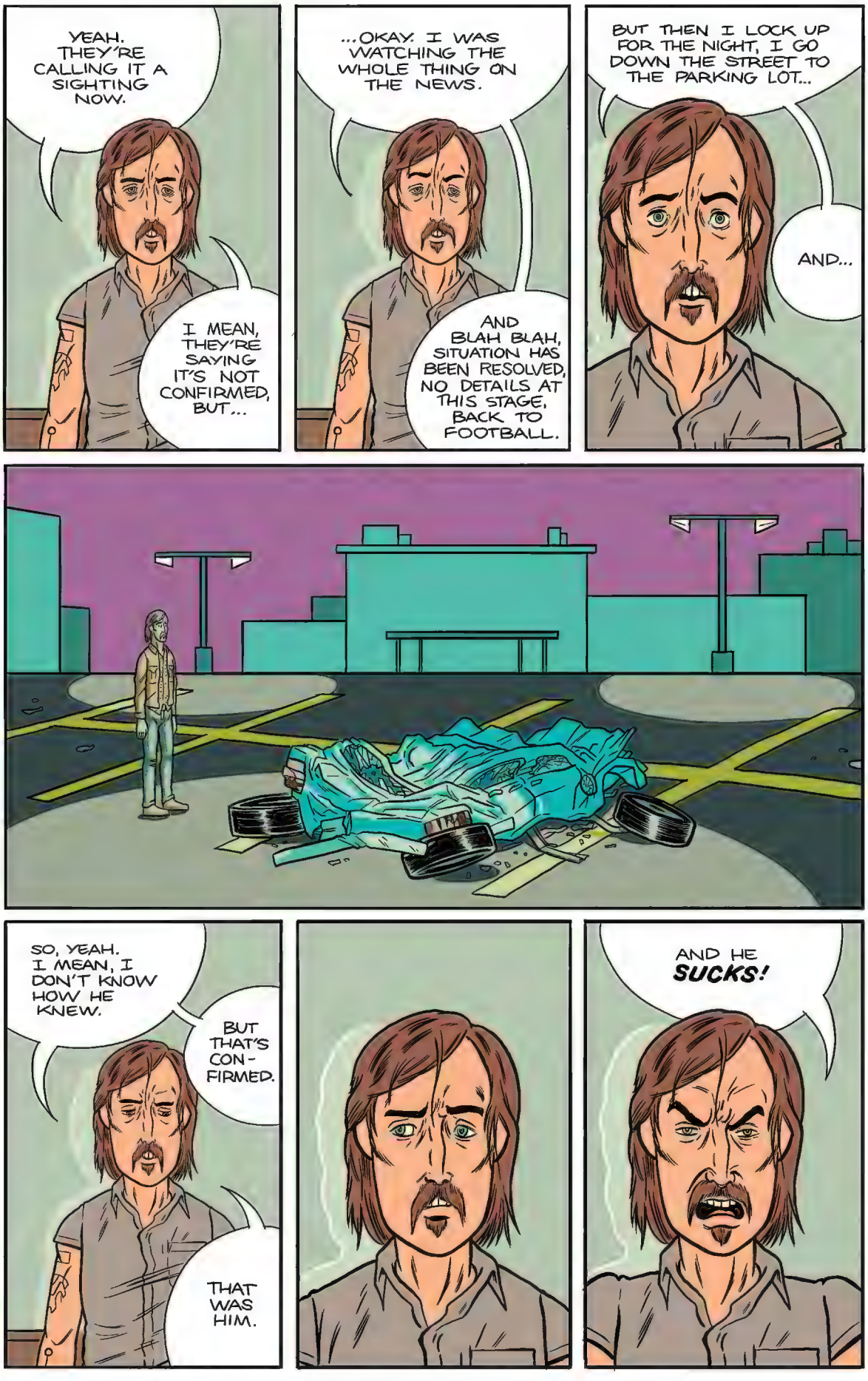

MONSTER? OL' JADE JAWS? COME ON, LADY.
HE'S A FOUNDING AVENGER. HE'S BEEN IN MOVIES. HE'S A HERO.
ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES, MAYBE--
"--BUT HE WAS DISARMING A FELON.
"LITERALLY!
M-MY HANDS-- BROKEN--
YOU WON'T USE THAT GAMMA BLAST AGAIN, HOTSHOT-- NO MATTER WHAT THE COURTS DECIDE!
"OR--SO HE THOUGHT!
"BECAUSE THE PAIN JUST MADE HOTSHOT MAD--AND THE MADDER HE GOT...
YOU THINK INJURY CAN STOP MY GAMMA POWER? THAT'S AN ERROR, YOU DULL-WITTED BRUTE--
WZZZHAM!
--YOUR FINAL ERROR!
"...THE STRONGER HE GOT!"

GOD HELP ME, I COULDN'T LOOK AWAY.
"I SAW IT ALL.
"THE HOLE IN HIS CHEST. THE PULPED, TORN REMAINS OF SKIN AND BONE...ARTERIES AND ORGANS...A CHARNEL HOUSE, OPEN TO THE WORLD.
"WE WAITED FOR HIM TO FALL.
"INSTEAD..."
THE LOOK ON HIS FACE. WHILE IT HAPPENED.
THAT'S WHAT I CAN'T FORGET.
"THE BOY SAID WHAT I WAS THINKING."
IT'S YOU!
YOU'RE THE SHADOW! THE ONE BELOW ALL!
YOU'RE THE DEVIL HIMSELF!

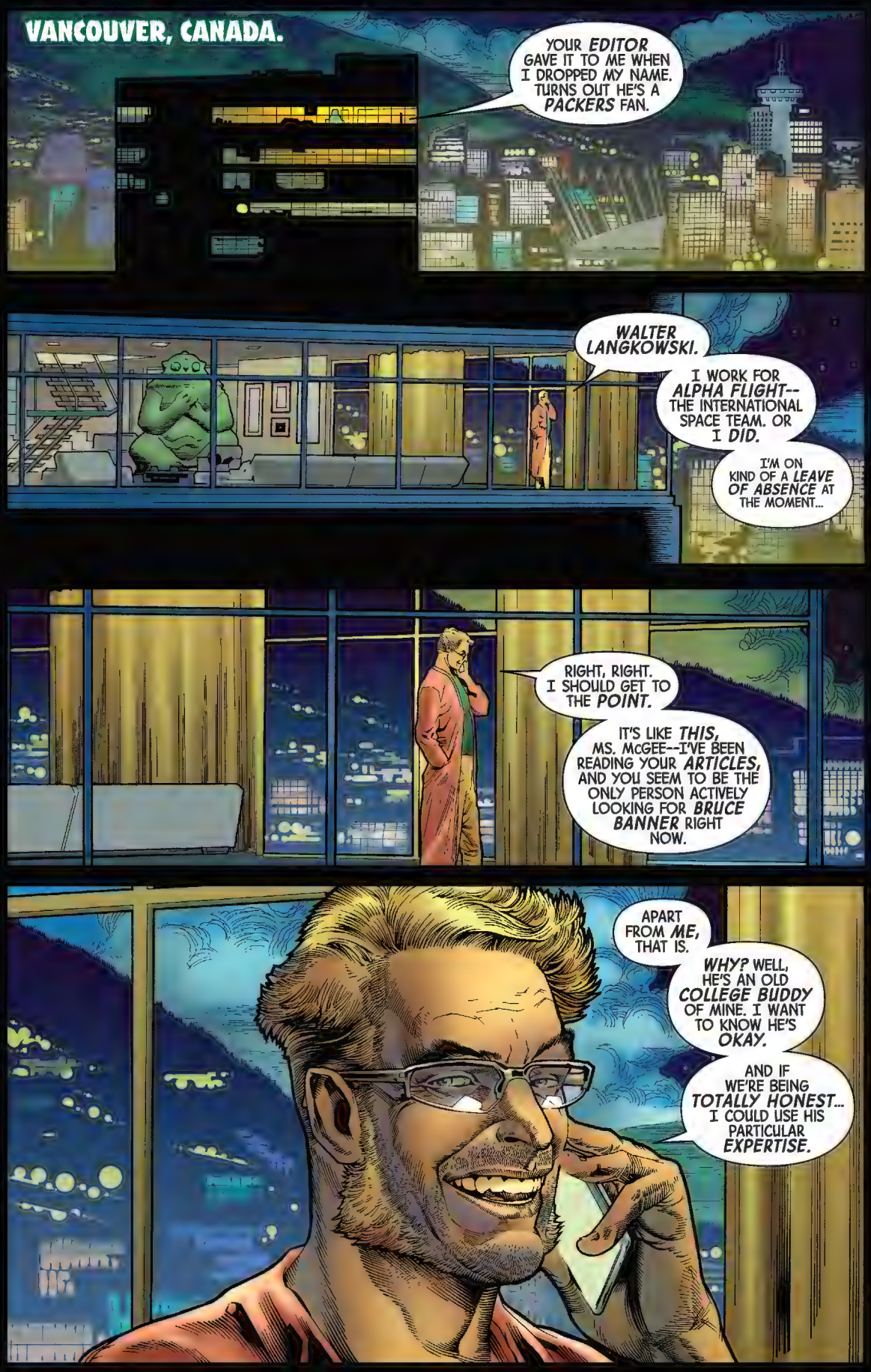

SIOUX FALLS
"YOU'RE THE DEVIL HIMSELF."
KNOW WHAT THE BIG GUY SAID TO *THAT*?
YOU'RE DAMNED RIGHT.
WHAPP
"'NUFF SAID."
HE WENT OUT THE WAY HE CAME IN--DIDN'T STAY TO BE THANKED. *MODEST*, Y'KNOW?
ANYWAY, WHEN LEMBERT WOKE *UP*, WE HAD HIM IN *CUFFS*--SPECIAL ONES. AND *THEN*...
...OH. YEAH.
THIS NEXT PART AIN'T SO FUN.

MEGA 7
"THE BOY HAD BEEN STAYING IN A MOTEL. ON THE EDGE OF TOWN. I WENT THERE, WITH THE POLICE.
"I DON'T KNOW WHY... SOMETHING IN HIS VOICE, I SUPPOSE. I HAD TO KNOW..."
SO I SAW THE BODY.
SHE...SHE WAS SMILING AT US. WHEN WE WENT IN.
"IT WAS A PEACEFUL SMILE."
GREEN DOOR
"GREEN DOOR."
I...I C-COULDN'T... I WASN'T, WASN'T ABLE TO...
...I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO PRAY, MS. McGEE.
NOT SINCE THAT DAY.
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?


JESS HARRISON.
SHE HAD A SUPER-PERSON NAME AS WELL. I DON'T REMEMBER IT.
I WENT TO VISIT HIM, YOU KNOW. IN THE... OH, WHAT WAS IT CALLED...
ONE OF THOSE SPECIAL FACILITIES. YOU KNOW.
HE SEEMED GLAD OF THE COMPANY.
IT WASN'T ME.
I--I TIED HER TO THE CHAIR--I HAD TO, HER POWER WAS OUT OF CONTROL, WE NEEDED HELP-- BUT I DIDN'T-- I'D NEVER--
SHE WAS ALIVE WHEN I LEFT HER.
I LOVED HER. YOU'VE-- YOU'VE GOT TO BELIEVE ME.
SOMEONE'S GOT TO BELIEVE ME.
"I TOLD HIM I'D PRAY FOR HIM...BUT..."
...WELL, HE FOUND A WAY TO HANG HIMSELF, I'M TOLD. IN HIS CELL. I'M NOT SURE HOW.
SUCH A TRAGEDY...
AH, WELL.
TEA?


YEAH. THEY'RE CALLING IT A SIGHTING NOW.
I MEAN, THEY'RE SAYING IT'S NOT CONFIRMED, BUT...
...OKAY. I WAS WATCHING THE WHOLE THING ON THE NEWS.
AND BLAH BLAH, SITUATION HAS BEEN RESOLVED, NO DETAILS AT THIS STAGE, BACK TO FOOTBALL.
BUT THEN I LOCK UP FOR THE NIGHT, I GO DOWN THE STREET TO THE PARKING LOT...
AND...
SO, YEAH. I MEAN, I DON'T KNOW HOW HE KNEW.
BUT THAT'S CON-FIRMED.
THAT WAS HIM.
AND HE SUCKS!

OKAY. LET'S GET SOME THOUGHTS DOWN...
IF THESE SIGHTINGS ARE "UNCONFIRMED," IT'S BECAUSE NOBODY WANTS TO CONFIRM THEM.
SOUTH DAKOTA NEWS 4
MERCER AVENUE HULK SIGHTING "UNCONFIRMED," SAY EXPERTS
THESE WITNESSES, THESE POINTS OF VIEW-- THEY ADD UP TO SOMETHING. MAYBE SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THE PEOPLE IN CHARGE THINK IT IS.
BUT...THERE WAS ONE OTHER PERSON AT THE CHURCH ON MERCER AVENUE.
THE SAME GUY WHO WAS IN ARIZONA. AND COLORADO.
AND UNTIL I CAN TALK TO HIM, I'M NOT GOING TO GET--
BZZZT
CALLER UNKNOWN
BZZZT
JACQUELINE McGEE? FROM THE ARIZONA HERALD?
...
HOW DID YOU GET THIS NUMBER?


VANCOUVER, CANADA.
YOUR EDITOR GAVE IT TO ME WHEN I DROPPED MY NAME. TURNS OUT HE'S A PACKERS FAN.
WALTER LANGKOWSKI.
I WORK FOR ALPHA FLIGHT-- THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE TEAM. OR I DID.
I'M ON KIND OF A LEAVE OF ABSENCE AT THE MOMENT...
RIGHT, RIGHT. I SHOULD GET TO THE POINT.
IT'S LIKE THIS, MS. McGEE--I'VE BEEN READING YOUR ARTICLES, AND YOU SEEM TO BE THE ONLY PERSON ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR BRUCE BANNER RIGHT NOW.
APART FROM ME, THAT IS.
WHY? WELL, HE'S AN OLD COLLEGE BUDDY OF MINE. I WANT TO KNOW HE'S OKAY.
AND IF WE'RE BEING TOTALLY HONEST... I COULD USE HIS PARTICULAR EXPERTISE.

# POINT OF VIEW

4

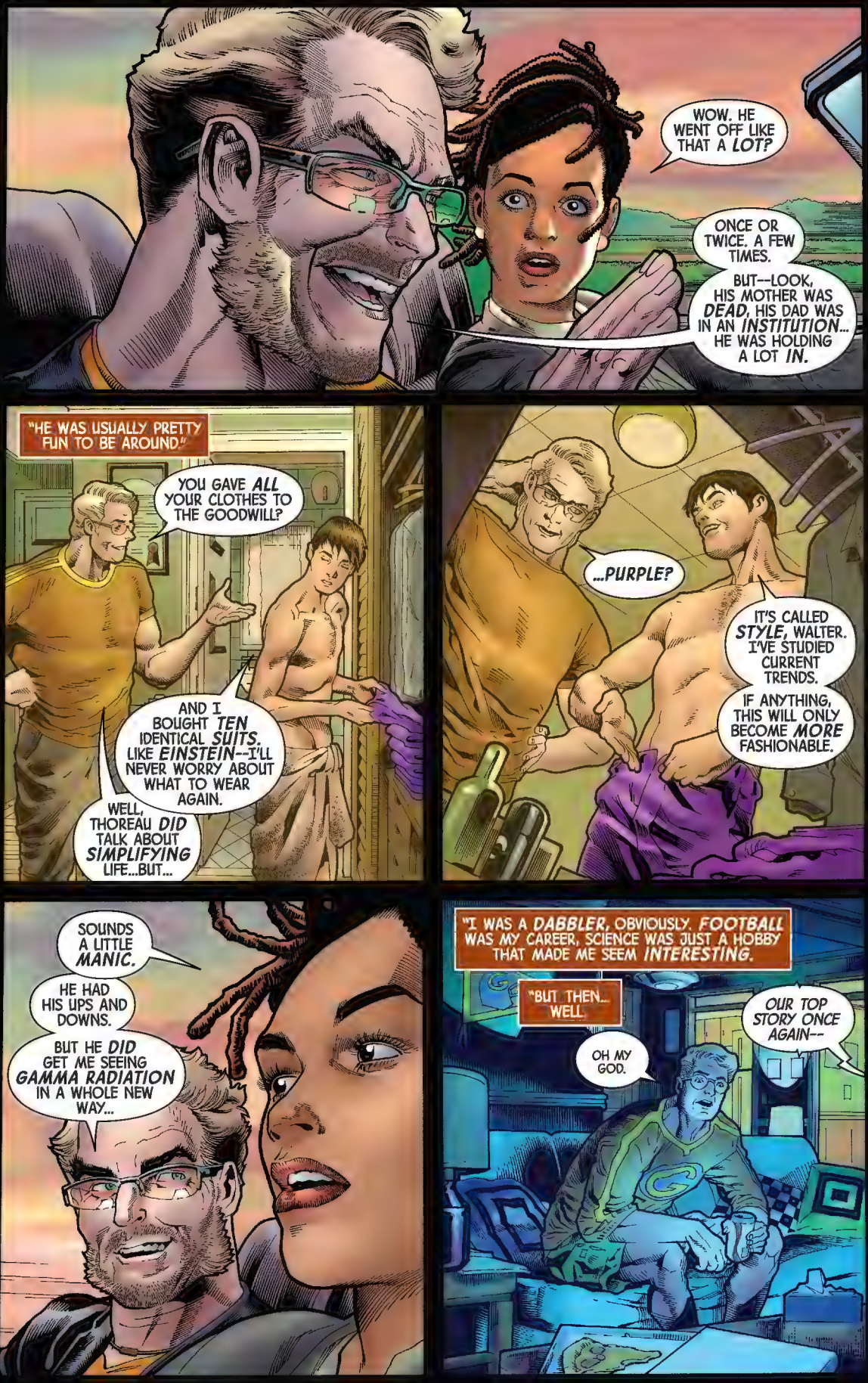
"ONE ALWAYS DIES TOO SOON--OR TOO LATE."

– JEAN-PAUL SARTRE
*NO EXIT*

SOUTH DAKOTA.
SERIOUSLY?
I'M AT THE AIRPORT, MURRAY. THE MAN'S PLANE JUST HIT THE TARMAC. IT'S A LITTLE LATE TO HAGGLE MY EXPENSES.
COME ON, MURRAY. I TOLD YOU WHY. WE BROKE THE STORY.
AND IF WE WANT TO KEEP IT, WE HAVE TO BREAK IT AGAIN.
UH-HUH--LOOK, I KNOW THERE WERE HULK SIGHTINGS BEFORE WE MADE THEM THE FRONT PAGE. BUT WE GAVE THEM LEGITIMACY.
THE GOVERNMENT CAN DENY AND OBFUSCATE ALL THEY WANT--PEOPLE KNOW BRUCE BANNER'S ALIVE. THEY'RE STARTING TO BELIEVE IT.
SO NOW THE PRESS BELIEVES IT, TOO. AND THEY ARE ON IT, MURRAY.
THE TIMES, THE POST, THE BUGLE--EVERYONE'S SNIFFING GREEN BLOOD IN THE WATER.
IF THE ARIZONA HERALD WANTS TO STAY IN THE RACE, IT'S NOT GOING TO BE ENOUGH TO JUST CHASE BANNER. WE NEED TO FIND HIM.
OKAY, FINE, I NEED TO FIND HIM. HAPPY? LOOK, THIS IS MY STORY, MURRAY--
UGH--YES, I'M KEEPING MY OBJECTIVITY. THIS--IT'S NOT ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED WHEN I WAS--MURRAY--
JUST LISTEN, OKAY? WE NEED BANNER TO GO ON THE RECORD. THE GUY I'M MEETING CAN HELP WITH THAT.
AND LOOK AT IT THIS WAY--EVEN IF WE CAN'T FIND BANNER...
JACQUELINE McGEE?
...HIS COLLEGE ROOMMATE IS THE NEXT BEST THING.
GOTTA GO.

HI. I'M WALTER LANGKOWSKI.
OR SASQUATCH, IF YOU'D RATHER-- CANADA'S OWN HAIRY HALF-A-HULK TURNED SPACE DIPLOMAT--
--AND BRUCE BANNER'S COLLEGE ROOMMATE.
PLEASURE TO MEET YOU.
SAME. SORRY, THAT WAS MY EDITOR.
APPARENTLY THERE'S BEEN A FRESH HULK SIGHTING ACROSS THE STATE LINE...
THEN I GUESS WE'RE DOING THIS ON THE MOVE.
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW FIRST?

HOW WE MET?
WELL, THIS WAS AT PENN STATE UNIVERSITY--HE TRANSFERRED THERE FOR A SEMESTER.
Welcomes You
PENN HAD LAB FACILITIES DESERT STATE DIDN'T--
GAMMA FACILITIES?
RIGHT. EVEN BACK THEN, HE WAS THINKING ABOUT GAMMA.
ANYWAY, HE NEEDED A RESEARCH ASSISTANT AND THERE I WAS...
"...WITH A FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP...
"...A HEAD FOR PHYSICS...AND A PASSION FOR KNOWLEDGE.
"WE GOT ALONG LIKE A HOUSE ON FIRE.
"MOSTLY."
FOR PITY'S SAKE, LANGKOWSKI--YOU CAN'T JUST "PICK UP" ADVANCED GAMMA THEORY! THIS ISN'T LEARNING THE OCARINA IN FIVE EASY STEPS--
WELL, WE'RE ALL HERE TO LEARN, AREN'T WE, BRUCE? DIDN'T THOREAU SAY--
YOU'RE NOT THOREAU, WALTER!
YOU'RE A JOCK! A HALF-SMART JOCK, A JOCK WITH AMBITIONS, BUT A JOCK IS WHAT YOU ARE!
EVERYONE ALREADY FAWNS OVER YOU FOR CARRYING A BALL AROUND--YOU WANT THEM TO LOVE YOU FOR YOUR MIND, TOO? WELL, TOUGH!
YOU GET THE FOOTBALL! THIS IS MINE!
MINE!

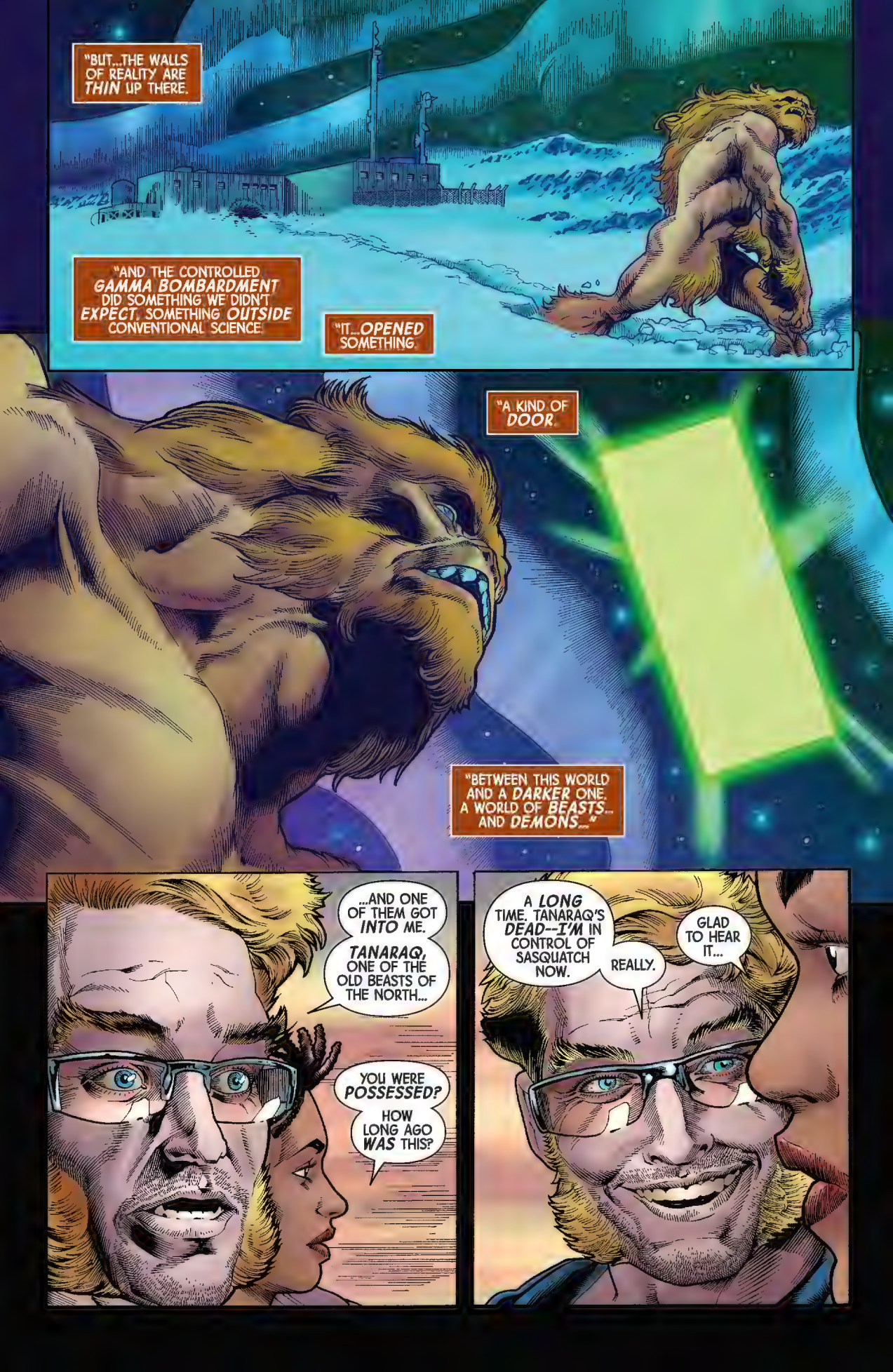

WOW. HE WENT OFF LIKE THAT A LOT?
ONCE OR TWICE. A FEW TIMES.
BUT--LOOK, HIS MOTHER WAS DEAD, HIS DAD WAS IN AN INSTITUTION... HE WAS HOLDING A LOT IN.
"HE WAS USUALLY PRETTY FUN TO BE AROUND."
YOU GAVE ALL YOUR CLOTHES TO THE GOODWILL?
AND I BOUGHT TEN IDENTICAL SUITS. LIKE EINSTEIN--I'LL NEVER WORRY ABOUT WHAT TO WEAR AGAIN.
WELL, THOREAU DID TALK ABOUT SIMPLIFYING LIFE...BUT...
...PURPLE?
IT'S CALLED STYLE, WALTER. I'VE STUDIED CURRENT TRENDS.
IF ANYTHING, THIS WILL ONLY BECOME MORE FASHIONABLE.
SOUNDS A LITTLE MANIC.
HE HAD HIS UPS AND DOWNS.
BUT HE DID GET ME SEEING GAMMA RADIATION IN A WHOLE NEW WAY...
"I WAS A DABBLER, OBVIOUSLY. FOOTBALL WAS MY CAREER, SCIENCE WAS JUST A HOBBY THAT MADE ME SEEM INTERESTING.
"BUT THEN... WELL.
OH MY GOD.
OUR TOP STORY ONCE AGAIN--

GENERAL THADDEUS ROSS-- SPEAKING ON THE RECORD-- TODAY CONFIRMED THAT THE MONSTER KNOWN AS THE HULK IS NONE OTHER THAN ATOMIC SCIENTIST ROBERT BRUCE BANNER.
VIEWERS MAY FIND THE FOLLOWING IMAGES DISTURBING--
BRUCE.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
LIVE
"THEN I GOT SERIOUS.
"LONG STORY SHORT--I QUIT FOOTBALL AND MADE IT MY MISSION TO DUPLICATE WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO BRUCE.
"AND--AT THE COST OF MY FORTUNE, AND WITH FUNDING AND ENCOURAGEMENT FROM DEPARTMENT H, THE CANADIAN SUPER HERO MONITORING AGENCY--
"--WE WENT AHEAD AND DID IT.
"EVER BEEN HIT BY A GAMMA BOMB, JACKIE?

"IT'S A TRIP"
...
A TRIP, HUH?
"DON'T LOOK."
BUT-- DADDY, HE'S--
REMEMBER WHAT THE TV SAID, BABY GIRL. THE EMERGENCY BROADCAST.
IF HE'S NEAR, YOU KEEP QUIET AND KEEP STILL. DON'T DRAW ATTENTION.

DON'T LOOK HIM IN THE EYE.
...YEAH. THAT LOOK IN YOUR EYE. I DO GET IT.
THAT'S WHY I DID IT.

I WAS A JOCK, REMEMBER? I WORKED OUT. I WAS TWICE AS STRONG AS BRUCE, EASILY.
SO, THE THINKING WENT, MY HULK COULD COUNTER HIS--CREATE A DETERRENT FOR CANADA. FOR THE WORLD. AND MY PERSONALITY WOULD REMAIN IN CONTROL.
I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'VE NOTICED, BUT I'M A PRETTY LAID-BACK GUY.
"NOT SO PRONE TO ANGER."
SO WHAT WAS THE CATCH?
THERE IS ALWAYS A CATCH, ISN'T THERE?
WE DID THE TEST IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE. ON THE OFF-CHANCE I DID START SMASHING, NOBODY WAS AROUND TO GET HURT.


"BUT...THE WALLS OF REALITY ARE *THIN* UP THERE.
"AND THE CONTROLLED *GAMMA BOMBARDMENT* DID SOMETHING WE DIDN'T *EXPECT*. SOMETHING *OUTSIDE* CONVENTIONAL SCIENCE.
"IT...*OPENED* SOMETHING.
"A KIND OF *DOOR*.
"BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND A *DARKER* ONE. A WORLD OF *BEASTS*... AND *DEMONS*..."
...AND ONE OF THEM GOT *INTO* ME.
*TANARAQ*, ONE OF THE OLD BEASTS OF THE NORTH...
YOU WERE *POSSESSED*?
HOW LONG AGO *WAS* THIS?
A *LONG* TIME. TANARAQ'S *DEAD--I'M* IN CONTROL OF SASQUATCH NOW.
REALLY.
GLAD TO HEAR IT...

AH. THE *HULK* SCHOOL OF VEHICLE MAINTENANCE.

I'LL GET THE DETAILS.

AFTER THAT, WE SHOULD LOOK FOR A *BAR.*

LITTLE *EARLY,* ISN'T IT?

WE'RE NOT DRINKING. WE'RE GOING FOR *INFORMATION.*

LIKE *BANNER* DOES.

...BECAUSE *ONE* MONSTER'S ENOUGH.

HE DID IT IN *COLORADO*-- AND *AGAIN* IN SOUTH DAKOTA. IT'S HOW HE FINDS *OUT* ABOUT THINGS.

THINGS HE CAN *SMASH...*

OH YAH. I REMEMBER THAT GUY.
HE ASKED FOR POP.
AND HE WAS ASKIN' ALL KINDSA QUESTIONS ABOUT NOAH SWANSON.
YEAH, THE POLICE TOLD ME. BIG METH DEALER, WASN'T HE?
IT'S HIS VAN WITH THE CARS MASHED INTO IT ON GARLAND STREET?
OH YAH, YOU BETCHA.
I SAID TO HIM, OH GEEZ, I SAID, YOU DON'T WANNA GO ASKIN' TOO MANY QUESTIONS THERE, FELLA--
SCREW YOU!
OH, HEY! HEY NOW!
YOU TWO KEEP IT DOWN, OKAY? DON'T MAKE ME COME OVER THERE!
SORRY, PAM.
THE TRIMPE'S
BURGER BEERS
THE TRIMPE'S
YOU HEARD HER--KEEP IT DOWN, JERK--
SCREW YOU--
ARE THEY REGULARS?
OH YAH, YOU BETCHA. THEY'RE REAL QUIET USUALLY, THOUGH.
DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOT INTO THEM.

GETTING BACK TO BANNER--WHAT DID YOU END UP TELLING HIM? IF HE WENT SOMEWHERE ELSE, I'D LIKE TO--
YOU SON OF A--
YOU'RE DEAD! YOU HEAR ME?
DEAD!
OH GEEZ--
RELAX, I'VE GOT THIS. SPACE DIPLOMAT, REMEMBER?
OKAY, BOYS. WHY DON'T YOU TELL UNCLE WALT WHAT'S GOT YOU SO RILED UP ON SUCH A NICE DAY, HUH?
ASK HIM--
HE KNOWS ALL ABOUT IT--
ALL ABOUT WHAT? COME ON, TELL ME.
WHAT ARE YOU TWO EVEN FIGHTING OVER?
WHERE'S ALL THIS ANGER COMING FROM?

OH GOD-- I DIDN'T--DIDN'T MEAN TO--
YOU-- YOU KILLED HIM-- WE GOTTA GO, MAN--
WALTER--
OH GEEZ--OH GEEZ--
THERE'S A PULSE! HE'S STILL ALIVE!
CALL AN AMBULANCE!

WE'RE GONNA LOSE HIM--THEY NEED HIM ON THE TABLE NOW--
CLEAR THE WAY!
PATIENT COMING THROUGH!
HELLO? MISS?
COPS ARE SENDING SOMEONE TO TAKE YOUR STATEMENT, IF YOU'RE OKAY TO WAIT HERE.
WALTER LANGKOWSKI... THAT'S REAL FAMILIAR...
YEAH. HE'S... HE'S A SUPER HERO.
SASQUATCH. FROM ALPHA FLIGHT.
OH YAH, I KNOW HIM. BIG ORANGE FELLA USUALLY.
...
YEAH. BIG AND ORANGE, PRETTY MUCH ALL THE TIME.
BUT NOT THEN. HE GETS CUT OPEN AND HE DOESN'T CHANGE? WHY WOULDN'T HE?
WHY WOULDN'T HE WANT TO...?
BLOOD'S IN PLACE--
BOY, HE'S BEEN OPENED RIGHT UP HERE...
OH YAH. HOPE NOBODY HAD PLANS...

"...WE'RE GONNA BE A LONG TIME."
...AND THAT'S EVERYTHING, MS. McGEE?
YES, DETECTIVE. IT WAS ALL JUST...OUT OF NOWHERE.
I DON'T THINK THEY EVEN KNEW WHY THEY DID IT...
WELL, CALL US IF YOU REMEMBER ANY MORE, BUT I THINK THAT'LL DO IT.
THOUGH, AH... IF YOU DO FIND BRUCE BANNER, MS. McGEE...
...WE'D SURE LIKE TO TALK TO HIM, YOU KNOW?
YEAH.
YEAH, ME TOO.
GOOD TIMING, THEN.

HERE I AM.
WHAT HAPPENED TO LANGKOWSKI?
HE...HE'S IN SURGERY. HE WAS STABBED WHILE...
...WHILE WE WERE LOOKING FOR YOU...
...I'M SORRY, WHAT...WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE...?
FOLLOWING A HUNCH.
ALL HUMANS EMIT RADIATION. SIMPLE BIOPHOTONS, MOSTLY--BARELY MEASURABLE.
BUT THE GAMMA-AFFECTED... WE HAVE VERY UNIQUE SIGNATURES.
AND WALTER'S IS JUST LIKE MINE.
YOU CAN SENSE THAT...?
NOT ME.
HE CAN.

GOT A FLATLINE-- WE NEED VASOPRESSIN HERE--
DAMN IT-- CRACK HIS CHEST--
HE'S NOT RESPONDING!
DON'T YOU DO THIS--NOT NOW, DON'T YOU DIE--
DON'T YOU DIE--
WHAT WAS WALTER'S PROGNOSIS WHEN THEY BROUGHT HIM IN?
I DON'T KNOW. NOT GOOD.
THE PARAMEDIC SAID THEY COULD LOSE HIM...
POTENTIALLY MORE THAN HIM.
WALTER... HE WANTED TO TURN HIMSELF INTO A SECOND HULK. YOU SEE?
HIS GAMMA SIGNATURE IS JUST LIKE MINE.
DAMN IT ALL.
WELL--WE TRIED. ALL WE CAN DO.
"EXACTLY LIKE MINE...

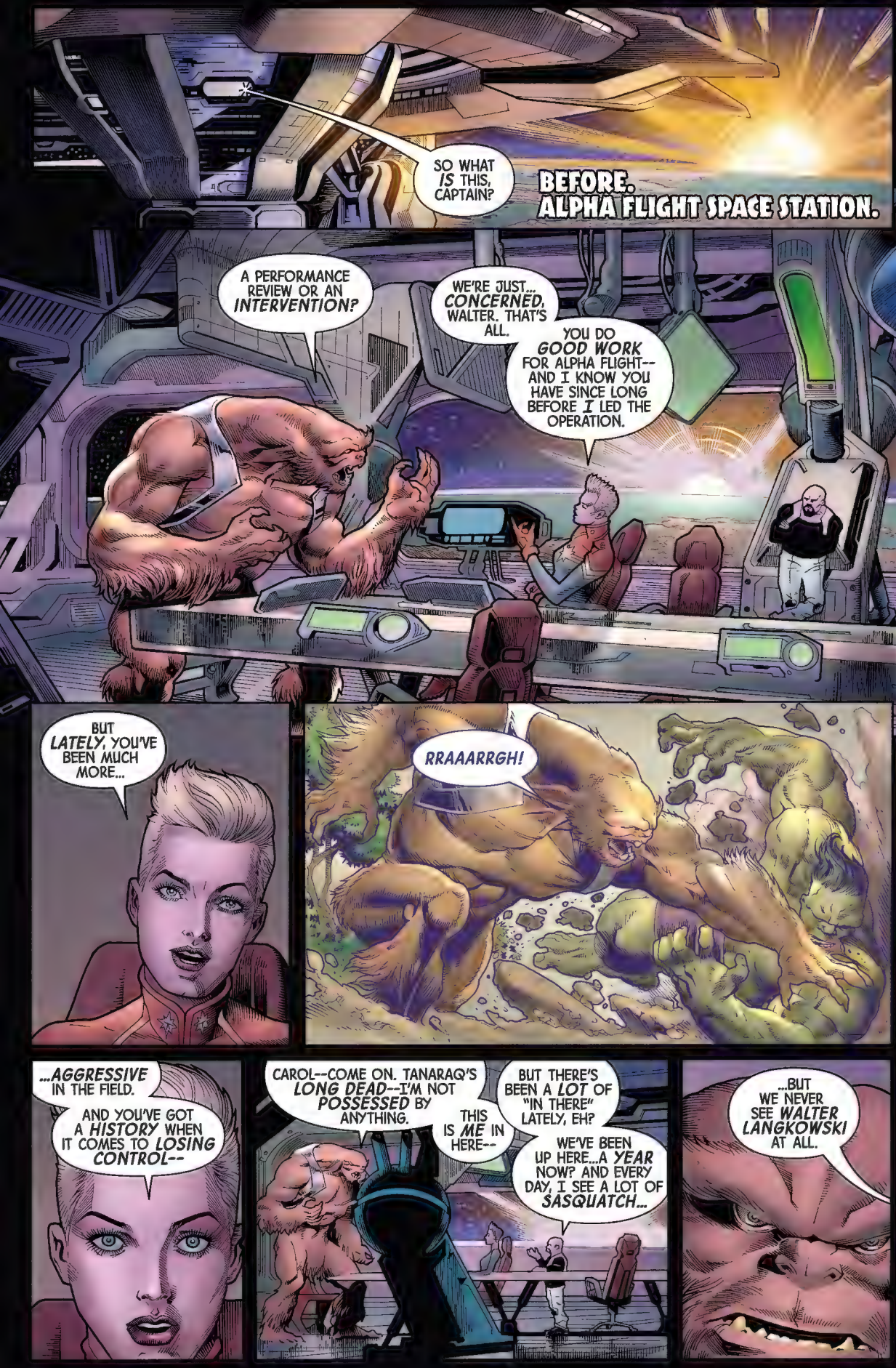
"...AND NOW THE SUN'S GONE DOWN."
CALL TIME OF--
--TIME OF--
--OF--
OH MY GOD.
IT'S NIGHT.
AND THE NIGHT IS HIS TIME.
WE NEED TO EVACUATE THE HOSPITAL.
NOW.
MY GOD.
GOD ABOVE...
GOD ABOVE?

# TIME OF DEATH

5

"MY DEVIL HAD BEEN LONG CAGED, HE CAME OUT ROARING."

— ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
*THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*


SO WHAT IS THIS, CAPTAIN?
BEFORE. ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
A PERFORMANCE REVIEW OR AN INTERVENTION?
WE'RE JUST... CONCERNED, WALTER. THAT'S ALL.
YOU DO GOOD WORK FOR ALPHA FLIGHT-- AND I KNOW YOU HAVE SINCE LONG BEFORE I LED THE OPERATION.
BUT LATELY, YOU'VE BEEN MUCH MORE...
RRAAARRGH!
...AGGRESSIVE IN THE FIELD.
AND YOU'VE GOT A HISTORY WHEN IT COMES TO LOSING CONTROL--
CAROL--COME ON. TANARAQ'S LONG DEAD--I'M NOT POSSESSED BY ANYTHING.
THIS IS ME IN HERE--
BUT THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF "IN THERE" LATELY, EH?
WE'VE BEEN UP HERE...A YEAR NOW? AND EVERY DAY, I SEE A LOT OF SASQUATCH...
...BUT WE NEVER SEE WALTER LANGKOWSKI AT ALL.

"WHY IS THAT?"
FINE.
YOU WANT WALTER?
I CAN-- NNHH--
C'MON--
I CAN BE--
--BE WALTER--
UFF. OKAY.
THAT WAS... YEAH, THAT WAS TOUGHER THAN IT USED TO BE.
I SHOULD PROBABLY TALK--
TO
SOMEONE
"I THINK HE WANTS OUT."

NOW.
MINNESOTA.
OKAY. YOU EVACUATE THE HOSPITAL--I'LL DEAL WITH LANGKOWSKI. OR WHATEVER HE'S BECOME.
WHICH PROBABLY ISN'T A GOOD SIGN.
WAIT A MINUTE--YOU CAN'T JUST--
I--I'VE GOT QUESTIONS--YOU OWE ME--
I OWE A LOT OF PEOPLE. EVERYTHING FROM STOLEN PANTS TO RUINED LIVES.
WHERE YOU FALL ON THAT SPECTRUM WILL HAVE TO WAIT.
YEAH? SO WHAT HAPPENS NOW--I TELL PEOPLE TO RUN BECAUSE A MAN MIGHT HAVE RISEN FROM THE DEAD?
WHY WOULD THEY EVEN BELIEVE ME?
YOU'RE A REPORTER, MS. McGEE. IT'S YOUR JOB TO MAKE PEOPLE BELIEVE YOU.
THE SCREAMING WILL PROBABLY HELP.
RRROOWWRR
EEAAAIGGGH!
I KNOW.
YOU'VE GOT YOUR JOB, TOO.

BUT LET ME TRY FIRST.
YOU NEVER KNOW.
WARD
Dr. Rob Bott
EMERGENCY-- ALL STAFF, WE HAVE A CODE SILVER--
--REPEAT, CODE SILVER--
--ALL STAFF AND PATIENTS MUST BE EVACUATED IMMEDIATELY.
REPEAT--ALL STAFF AND PATIENTS, EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY--
HELLO, WALTER.
CAN WE TALK?
...
I'M NOT WALTER.

AND I'D RATHER TALK TO THE REAL YOU.
SHHKK
IT HURTS TO DIE, DOESN'T IT, BRUCE?
HHKK
AH--
--ALWAYS.
AND WHEN YOU HURT... BANNER...

...I TAKE IT PERSONAL.
SO YOU'RE NOT LANGKOWSKI.
THAT FITS.
RRRRR...
LANGKOWSKI'S A CREEP--
--SMUG LITTLE KNOW-IT-ALL, ALWAYS WAS--
--BUT HE NEVER HAD THREE MURDERS IN HIM.
YOU'RE SOMETHING ELSE, AREN'T YOU?

SEE, NOBODY'S EVER LOVED WALT FOR HIS MIND. THEY ONLY EVER WANT THE JOCK.
SO HE ONLY FEELS NEEDED WHEN HE'S FURRY... AND HE STAYS THAT WAY FOR MONTHS.
GETTING WARM?
VERY CLEVER--
CLEVER LITTLE MONSTER!
NNRRHH--
S-SO LANGKOWSKI-- STAYED AS SASQUATCH TOO LONG--
--WHICH LEFT A DOOR OPEN. AND YOU GOT IN.
IN THROUGH THE GREEN DOOR.
YOU GOT INTO HOTSHOT'S GIRLFRIEND TOO, RIGHT? WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?
YOU WANTED MY ATTENTION? WHY?
WHAT ARE YOU?
TANARAQ? MEPHISTO? SOMETHING WORSE?
WHO'S IN THERE?

SEE FOR YOURSELF, LITTLE MONSTER.
BEHIND YOU.
"IT'S BEHIND YOU."
GIVE ME A--
LITTLE.
MONSTER.
...
DADDY?

DIDN'T I SAY?
AAARRHHH--
I'VE KNOWN WHAT YOU WOULD BECOME SINCE THE BEGINNING!
I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN. THAT QUICK MIND OF HIS--THOSE BRILLIANT INTUITIVE LEAPS.
FROM THE DAY HE WAS BORN--
NO--
--IT WAS YOU!
ALWAYS YOU!
ARRHH--
THE MONSTER INSIDE.
I WISH I'D KILLED YOU IN YOUR CRIB.

"IT SOUNDS LIKE HELL ON EARTH--"
--LIKE A DOZEN EARTHQUAKES AT ONCE. THEY'RE GOING TO KNOCK THIS WHOLE BUILDING DOWN.
CAN WE GET THESE PEOPLE OUT OF HERE ANY FASTER?
IT'S NOT THAT EASY.
THERE ARE PEOPLE HERE WHO CAN'T BE MOVED, PEOPLE ON LIFE SUPPORT--WE'RE NOT PREPARED FOR THIS. THEY SAID--
THEY SAID HE WAS DEAD.
HEY! MARCIE!

ARE THE COPS COMING?
I--I DON'T KNOW--THEY PUT ME THROUGH TO SOME GOVERNMENT PEOPLE--
I'M ON HOLD--
THEY'RE IN THE WARDS!
THEY CAME RIGHT THROUGH THE WALL--
I--I DON'T KNOW WHO'S STILL IN THERE--
OH MY GOD.
EVERYONE--KEEP CALM AND MAKE YOUR WAY OUT, OKAY?
I--I'M GONNA GO SEE WHAT I CAN DO--
NOT WITHOUT ME.
I'M NOT LOSING HIM AGAIN.
IT'S NOT. NOT YOU.
CAN'T BE.
YOU CAN SEE GHOSTS. YOU CAN SMELL LIES.
YOU'D KNOW IF IT WEREN'T.

I'M THE FATHER YOU KILLED, BRUCE. BACK THROUGH THE GREEN DOOR.
BACK FROM DEATH.
STAY BACK-- STAY--
FEEL THAT? MY CLAWS IN YOUR GUT? THAT'S THE PROOF!
WHO ELSE COULD EVER HURT YOU LIKE THIS?
AAAHHH--
WHO ELSE CAN MAKE THE MONSTER SCARED?
NO...
NO!
NEVER!

YOU'RE JUST A MAN. A TWISTED OLD MAN...WHO KILLED HIS WIFE...TRIED TO KILL HIS SON...MADE HIM WISH--HRRH--WISH YOU HAD...
YOU SCARE HIM. YOU SCARE BANNER.
YOU THINK THAT GIVES YOU POWER OVER ME?
THINK IT MAKES YOU IMPORTANT? SPECIAL?
NO, HRRHH. NOT. NOT SPECIAL...
PUNY...
PUNY HUMAN!
YOU'RE NOTHING! ANY POWER YOU HAVE, SOMEONE GAVE YOU!
WHO?
WHO BROUGHT YOU BACK? WHO OPENS THE DOOR?
TELL ME!
OR I'LL SMASH YOU!

IT...IT NEEDS A HOST PERSONALITY... TO WORK IN THIS WORLD, TO FUNCTION...
IT BURROWS IN...WEARS OUR SOULS...LIKE MASKS ON A STAGE...
HELP ME...
WHAT DOES? TELL ME!
WHAT'S BEHIND YOU?
EVERY LIGHT CASTS A SHADOW.
IN EVERY MIRROR... THERE IS A REFLECTION.
AS ABOVE...
...SO BELOW.
ARRGH!
TAKE A GOOD LOOK, MY SPECIAL BOY.
YOU'LL SEE A DARKER SHADOW THAN YOURS.

RAARHH--
GAMMA MADE LANGKOWSKI YOUR EQUAL. HE JUST DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO USE IT, THAT'S ALL.
DO YOU? DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?
I SMELL THE SICK AND THE WEAK! I SMELL CHILDREN!
HOW MANY?
HOW MANY DO I HAVE TO--
EH?
BZZT
A TASER.
WELL, BOY...
I--I--
BACK UP--
...THAT'S ONE MORE.
HURRK--
NO!

REMEMBER. ALL THIS...
...IS THE MONSTER'S FAULT.
GAMMA.
NNHH--
MADE LANGKOWSKI WHAT HE IS. MADE YOU.
KEEPS YOUR GREEN DOOR OPEN, DOESN'T IT?
DOESN'T IT?
BUT I EAT GAMMA!
AAAHHHH--
UNNH...
WALTER...?
WHAT... WHAT DID YOU...

GAMMA RADIATION. I ABSORB IT. MAKES ME STRONGER.
TOOK ALL OF HIS--NO MORE SASQUATCH.
NO MORE DAD...OR WHATEVER THAT WAS.
HE'S ALIVE.
YOU-- YOU SAVED HIM--
SHUT UP, McGEE.
YOU'RE WITH A LOCAL PAPER-- BUT YOU DROVE ACROSS HOW MANY STATES TO FIND ME?
AND YOU COULDN'T...HRRH... EVEN LOOK AT BANNER. I NOTICED. CAN'T LOOK RIGHT AT ME, EITHER, I'LL BET.
WHATEVER THIS IS TO YOU... WHATEVER HE OWES...
...IT'S PERSONAL.
THE TRUTH.
NOW.
I'VE STILL GOT A MAN'S BLOOD ON ME. MAYBE... BECAUSE OF...
ALL RIGHT.
WHEN I WAS 15, YOU DESTROYED MY HOME. MY WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD. AND THEY...THEY SAID...
THEY SAID TO NEVER LOOK YOU IN THE EYE.
BUT I DID. I SAW YOU THAT DAY.
AND I HAVE QUESTIONS.

...
ALL RIGHT. ONE QUESTION.
BUT MAKE IT QUICK.
FINE. HERE'S MY--MY QUICK QUESTION--
--HOW DO I DO IT? HOW?
HOW DO I GET TO BE WHAT YOU ARE?
JUST... GO HOME, McGEE.
GO HOME.

THERE ARE TWO PEOPLE IN EVERY MIRROR.
JACKIE... WHAT...
WHAT HAPPENED HERE...?
YOU HAPPENED. YOU DID THIS. DON'T YOU REMEMBER?
SASQUATCH KILLED A MAN RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME--I DON'T EVEN KNOW HIS NAME--
HE'S... GONE...
THE HULK? YEAH, HE JUST--
NO. NOT THE HULK.
SASQUATCH.
I...I COULD ALWAYS FEEL HIM...AND NOW I CAN'T. HE'S GONE.
WHERE DID HE GO?
THERE'S THE ONE YOU CAN SEE.
AND THERE'S THE OTHER ONE.

# IN EVERY MIRROR

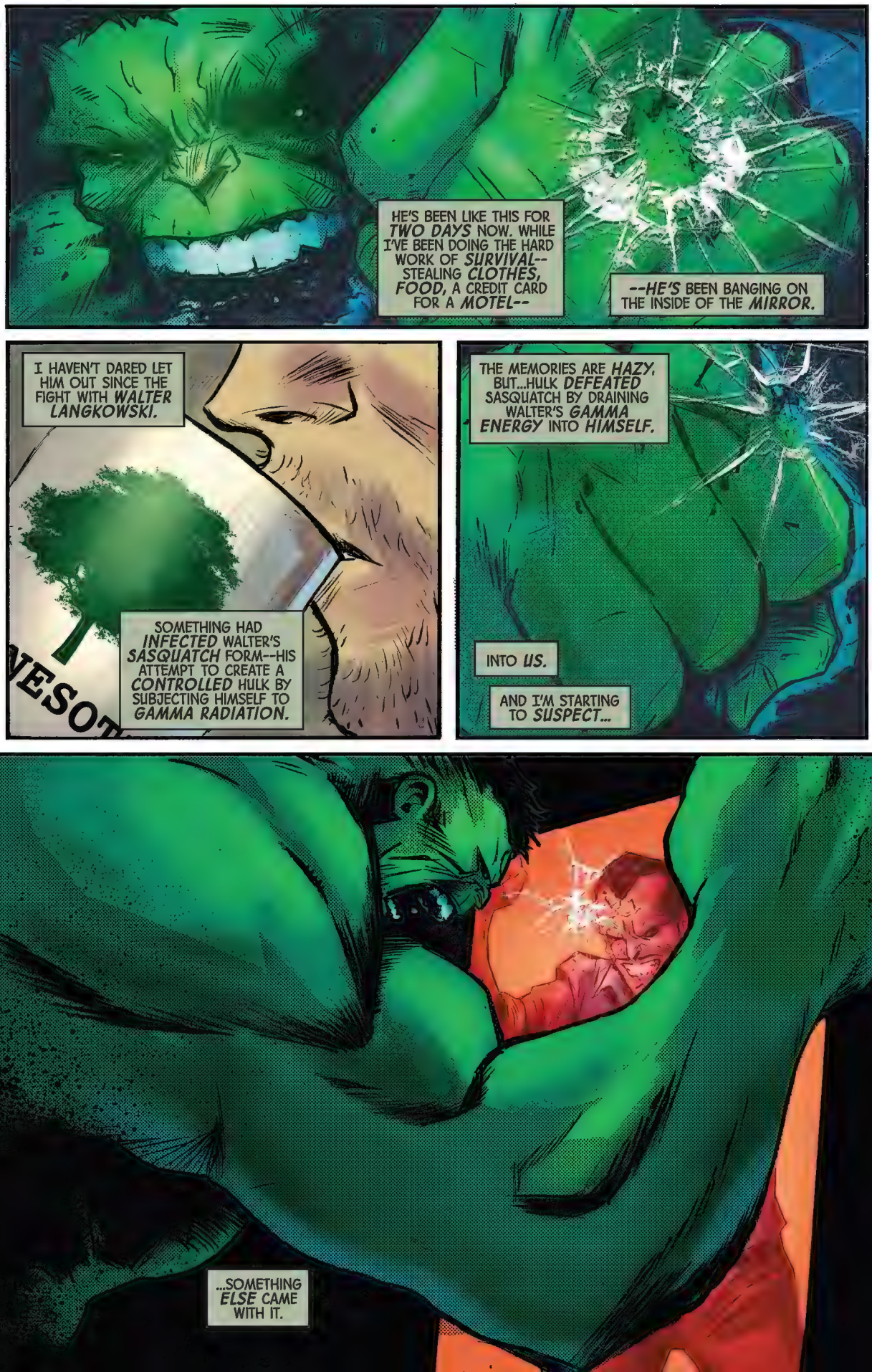
6

“FOR I DO NOT EXIST: THERE EXIST BUT THE THOUSANDS OF MIRRORS THAT REFLECT ME.”

– VLADIMIR NABOKOV
*THE EYE*

MY NAME IS BRUCE BANNER.
YEARS AGO... I DIED.
BUT I COULDN'T STOP SCREAMING.
SO I GOT UP AGAIN.
SOMETHING INSIDE ME WAS UNLOCKED THAT DAY.
A DARK OPPOSITE. A SHADOW-SELF.
STRONGER THAN ME. STRONGER THAN ANYONE.
TOO STRONG FOR DEATH TO CLAIM.
I CAN DIE-- DURING THE DAY. BUT THE NIGHT IS HIS TIME.
AND WHEN IT COMES... HE DRAGS ME BACK.
THEN I'M LEFT WITH HAZY, BROKEN MEMORIES...

MINNESOTA.
...AND HIS RAGE IN MY MIRROR.
IF I'M THE SCIENTIFIC SELF--THE VOICE OF RATIONALITY--THE HULK REPRESENTS UNREASON.
HE'S SMARTER THAN I AM--BUT IT TAKES THE FORM OF HUNCHES AND GUT FEELINGS. STRANGE SYNCHRONICITIES. INTUITIVE CONNECTIONS.
MAGICAL THINKING.
KRRK
...
THAT'S NEW.
NNESOTA


HE'S BEEN LIKE THIS FOR TWO DAYS NOW. WHILE I'VE BEEN DOING THE HARD WORK OF SURVIVAL--STEALING CLOTHES, FOOD, A CREDIT CARD FOR A MOTEL--
--HE'S BEEN BANGING ON THE INSIDE OF THE MIRROR.
I HAVEN'T DARED LET HIM OUT SINCE THE FIGHT WITH WALTER LANGKOWSKI.
SOMETHING HAD INFECTED WALTER'S SASQUATCH FORM--HIS ATTEMPT TO CREATE A CONTROLLED HULK BY SUBJECTING HIMSELF TO GAMMA RADIATION.
THE MEMORIES ARE HAZY, BUT...HULK DEFEATED SASQUATCH BY DRAINING WALTER'S GAMMA ENERGY INTO HIMSELF.
INTO US.
AND I'M STARTING TO SUSPECT...
...SOMETHING ELSE CAME WITH IT.

I NEED TO TALK TO HIM.
WE USED TO BE ABLE TO. DIPLOMATIC CONFERENCES IN BAROQUE MINDSCAPES. METAPHORICAL WRESTLING MATCHES.
NOW...I NEED OTHER METHODS.
I CLOSE MY EYES. TAKE A BREATH. LET IT GO.
EMPTY MY MIND.
LET MY HAND MOVE AS IT WILL. NOTHING GUIDING THE PEN ON THE PAPER...
...BUT MY UNCONSCIOUS.
NOW WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, HULK?
AUTOMATIC WRITING.
THE MAGICIAN JOHN DEE USED IT TO TRANSCRIBE THE LANGUAGE OF ANGELS.
THE IRONY DOESN'T ESCAPE ME.
HOME
WHERE'S "HOME"...?

CALIFORNIA.
--AUTHORITIES REMAIN SILENT ON THE EVENTS THAT LEFT FOUR DEAD IN A MINNESOTA HOSPITAL-- BUT ON SOCIAL MEDIA, THE RUMORS WON'T GO AWAY.
WE'LL HAVE MORE ON THE DEADLIEST HULK SIGHTING YET AFTER THESE MESSAGES--
FOUR KILLED IN ALLEGED HULK ATTACK
IT ISN'T HIM.
JUST STOP IT, BETTY. STOP DOING THIS TO YOURSELF.
IT ISN'T HIM.
YOUR HUSBAND ISN'T BACK FROM THE DEAD.
KLIK
IF HE WERE BACK, HE'D HAVE--
--HE'D HAVE LET ME KNOW--HE'D-- HE'D HAVE--
IT ISN'T HIM.
IT CAN'T BE...
OUCH.
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU GUYS...

ELSEWHERE.

SUBJECT: LEONARD SAMSON 15:04:54 EDT

SUBJECT: RICHARD JONES 18:04:54 PDT

SUBJECT: ELIZABETH ROSS BANNER 18:04:54 PDT

...BUT *I'M* STARTING TO FEEL LIKE A *CREEP.*

WHY? IT'S JUST *MONITORING.*

HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO KNOW IF BANNER'S CONTACTING HIS *SUPPORT NETWORK* IF WE DON'T KEEP *TABS* ON THEM?

I HONESTLY FIGURED HE'D SHOW UP WHEN *CHO* WENT CRAZY IN *NEW YORK--*

HE SHOULD'VE SHOWED UP FOR A *LOT* OF THINGS.

BANNER HASN'T EVEN VISITED *RICK JONES' GRAVE.* THAT'S JUST *COLD.*

SORRY, ARE WE--IS THIS *DATA LOGGING?*

MONITOR *FIVE*-- NO CONTACT WITH SUBJECT *SKAAR* IN THE LAST 24 HOURS, LOG AND *RECORD--*

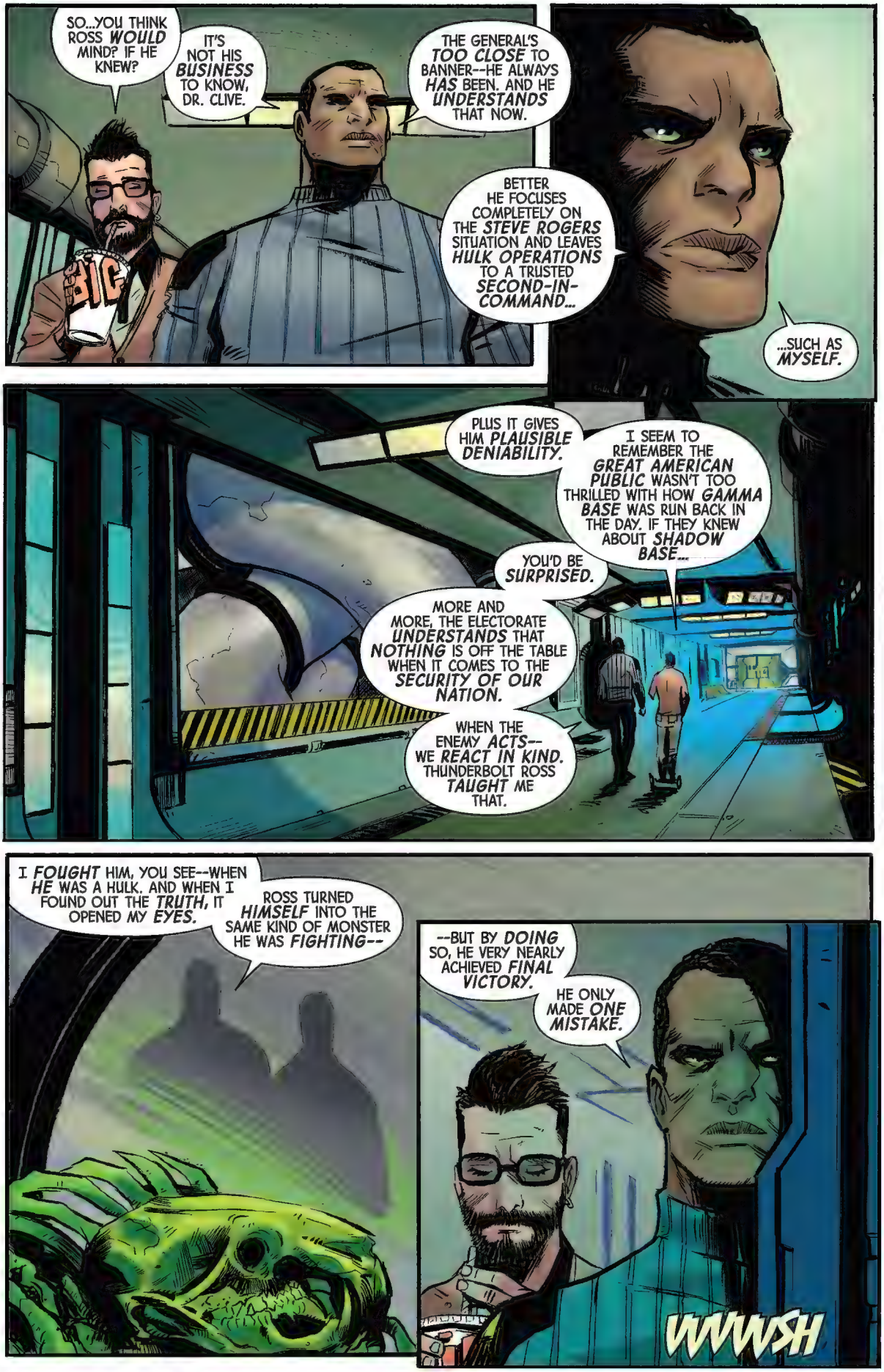
NO, WE'RE JUST--IT'S A *CONVERSATION,* FIVE. C'MON.

ALL I'M SAYING IS, THIS ISN'T JUST A *CIVILIAN,* THIS IS--IT'S *GENERAL ROSS' DAUGHTER.* THE *BOSS* OF OUR *BOSS.*

IT JUST FEELS LIKE--

--*THIS JOB IS TOO MUCH FOR YOU.*

GENERAL FORTEAN...?
I WAS LISTENING IN. EVEN THE MONITORS NEED TO BE MONITORED.
MONITOR WORK TAKES DEDICATION, YOU SEE. UNQUESTIONING DEDICATION.
MAYBE WE SHOULD PUT YOU TO WORK ON SOMETHING MORE YOUR SPEED.
I-- SIR, I WAS ONLY--
BDOOP
THE REST OF YOU--THE PEOPLE ON THOSE SCREENS ARE NOT INNOCENT BYSTANDERS.
THEY ARE NOT CIVILIANS. THEY ARE NOT FRIENDLIES.
THEY HAVE ALL GIVEN AID AND COMFORT TO THE HULK.
WE'LL HAVE YOUR IMPLANT PROCEDURES REVERSED BY 0600. THEN YOU CAN REPORT TO SANITATION FOR A MOP.
MONITOR FIVE WILL HANDLE YOUR FEED UNTIL WE INSTALL YOUR REPLACEMENT. HE UNDERSTANDS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORK.
THAT MAKES THEM THE ENEMY.
AS YOU WERE.
OOF.
SORRY, BRO.


SO...YOU THINK ROSS WOULD MIND? IF HE KNEW?
IT'S NOT HIS BUSINESS TO KNOW, DR. CLIVE.
THE GENERAL'S TOO CLOSE TO BANNER--HE ALWAYS HAS BEEN. AND HE UNDERSTANDS THAT NOW.
BETTER HE FOCUSES COMPLETELY ON THE STEVE ROGERS SITUATION AND LEAVES HULK OPERATIONS TO A TRUSTED SECOND-IN-COMMAND...
...SUCH AS MYSELF.
PLUS IT GIVES HIM PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY.
I SEEM TO REMEMBER THE GREAT AMERICAN PUBLIC WASN'T TOO THRILLED WITH HOW GAMMA BASE WAS RUN BACK IN THE DAY. IF THEY KNEW ABOUT SHADOW BASE...
YOU'D BE SURPRISED.
MORE AND MORE, THE ELECTORATE UNDERSTANDS THAT NOTHING IS OFF THE TABLE WHEN IT COMES TO THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION.
WHEN THE ENEMY ACTS-- WE REACT IN KIND. THUNDERBOLT ROSS TAUGHT ME THAT.
I FOUGHT HIM, YOU SEE--WHEN HE WAS A HULK. AND WHEN I FOUND OUT THE TRUTH, IT OPENED MY EYES.
ROSS TURNED HIMSELF INTO THE SAME KIND OF MONSTER HE WAS FIGHTING--
--BUT BY DOING SO, HE VERY NEARLY ACHIEVED FINAL VICTORY.
HE ONLY MADE ONE MISTAKE.
WWWSH

HE THOUGHT ONE MONSTER WAS ENOUGH.

BIG

BUZZA

SNACKS

HEY, CHARLENE. HOW'S OUR BUDDY DEL TODAY?

MR. FRYE'S BEEN THE SAME SINCE THEY DUG HIM OUT OF THAT GRAVE IN COLORADO.

HIS PAIN RECEPTORS ARE STILL OFF THE CHARTS--HE'S IN AGONY--BUT IF YOU APPROVE SOME ADJUSTMENTS TO THE TANK MIX, WE CAN REDUCE THAT.

ELIMINATE IT, EVEN--

EXCEPT RECALIBRATING THE SYSTEM WOULD TAKE DAYS, AND WHAT DO WE GET? WHAT'S OUR GET HERE, CHARLENE?

FORGET HIS LITTLE FEE-FEES. WHERE ARE WE AT ON REPLICATING HIM?

JASE? WHAT HAVE WE GOT?

NOT MUCH, DR. McGOWAN.

PRETTY SURE WHAT CAUSED THIS IS IN HIS BLOOD--SOME KIND OF GAMMA SERUM--BUT IT'S LIKE...

...LIKE CRACKING A CODE WRITTEN IN A DEAD LANGUAGE. WE NEED A ROSETTA STONE.

LIKE I'VE BEEN TELLING YOU, GENERAL, WE CAN'T MAKE PROGRESS ON THE REAL GOALS OF THE PROJECT WITHOUT AN ACTUAL HULK TO STUDY.

AND THAT WOULD REQUIRE RESOURCES WE DON'T HAVE, DOCTOR--NOT YET.

THE SHEER FIREPOWER IT WOULD TAKE TO CAPTURE THE HULK--

NOT THE HULK--A HULK. AN ACTIVE ONE.

LIKE CHO OR WALTERS, BUT...I DON'T KNOW, SOMEONE NOBODY WILL MISS...

...

WHERE DID THEY TAKE LANGKOWSKI?

THE ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
I DIDN'T WANT ANY OF THIS. YOU ALL KNOW THAT, RIGHT?
I MEAN, I CHECKED WITH SHAMAN. I ASKED HIM IF THE GREAT BEASTS WERE ACTIVE.
IF TANARAQ MIGHT BE BACK--
--AND YOU SAID NO, MIKE. I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER THAT.
HOLD STILL, PLEASE, WALTER.
THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO FIND BRUCE. I THOUGHT THE--THE MONSTER IN THE MIRROR--
--I THOUGHT IT WAS PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOME VERSION OF WHAT HE HAD. MAYBE IT IS, I DON'T KNOW.
BUT I WOULD NEVER CHOOSE TO...TO HURT ANYONE.
NEVER.
REALLY?
YOU SPENT HALF YOUR LIFE--MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF YOUR OWN MONEY, YEARS OF STUDY--WORKING TO BECOME A HAIRY HULK.
ALL OF THIS IS BECAUSE YOU MADE A CHOICE.
I DIDN'T CHOOSE TO GET STABBED, JACKIE!
DYING ON THE TABLE WAS NOT A VOLUNTARY ACT--
ALL RIGHT, WALT. SIMMER DOWN.
MS. McGEE--YOU'RE HERE BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY EYEWITNESS TO WHAT HAPPENED.

YOU SEE ANY SIGNS OF THIS THING BEFORE THE HOSPITAL, OR...?
...
THE STABBING--SOMETHING ABOUT THAT BOTHERS ME. IT WAS...TOO RANDOM, IF THAT MAKES SENSE.
THERE WAS NO ARGUMENT BEFORE WE GOT THERE. BUT THEN...IT WAS LIKE THE CLOSER WALTER GOT, THE ANGRIER THEY GOT...
SO YOU'RE BLAMING ME FOR MY OWN DEATH NOW?
NOT YOU.
THE THING THAT STOLE YOUR BODY AT THE POINT OF DEATH AND MADE IT A MURDER WEAPON.
NOT TANARAQ, NOR ANY OF THE BEASTS. THEY STILL SLUMBER. THIS IS SOMETHING DEEPER.
IMAGINE... A PRIMAL SHADOW, WAITING IN THE DARKNESS UNDERNEATH ALL THAT IS.
CREATION'S OTHER FACE. THE FACE WE CANNOT BEAR TO SEE.
THE ONE BELOW ALL.
SERIOUSLY? POSSESSION BY THE FORCES OF DARKNESS?
DON'T KNOCK IT, EH?
YOU WALK THE PATHS I HAVE, AND THOSE FORCES START TO LOOK VERY REAL, JACKIE--AND MORE THAN A LITTLE SCARY.
MAYBE. BUT YOU UNDERSTAND HOW IT'LL SOUND TO A JURY, RIGHT?
BELIEVE ME, MS. McGEE...

...I ABSOLUTELY *DO.*
CAN YOU GIVE US THE ROOM? I'LL BE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE IN JUST A MOMENT.
...SURE.
UH...*HI,* CAROL...
WALTER.
I JUST FINISHED TALKING TO ONE *GENERAL FORTEAN.*
CURRENTLY IN CHARGE OF *U.S. HULK OPERATIONS.* A CALL TO THADDEUS ROSS *CONFIRMED* THAT.
EX-*USAF,* LIKE ME-- HE PLAYED THAT CARD A *LOT.* BUILDING A *RAPPORT.*
HE'S A VERY CHARMING MAN...
...WHO VERY CHARMINGLY THREATENED YOU WITH *LETHAL INJECTION.*
AFTER *EXTRADITION AND TRIAL,* OF COURSE.

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, HE WAS VERY APOLOGETIC. HE'D LOVE TO MAKE IT ALL GO AWAY...
I'LL BET, EH? WHAT DOES HE GET IN RETURN?
THAT'S THE THING. UNDER OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES, I'D PROBABLY HAVE PURSUED IT ANYWAY.
WE HAVE WALTER'S GAMMA SIGNATURE. WITH ALPHA FLIGHT'S SATELLITE COVERAGE, WE COULD LOCATE HIM, IF WE HAD TO.
OR...WE COULD FIND A SIGNATURE VERY SIMILAR TO WALTER'S. LIKE BRUCE BANNER'S.
ESSENTIALLY, IF MY TEAM SECURES BANNER FOR THE PROPER AUTHORITIES--WALTER IS EXONERATED.
IF I SAY NO, THEY TAKE HIM INSTEAD.
IT SEEMS YOU HAVE LITTLE CHOICE, CAPTAIN MARVEL.
BUT WITHOUT THE POWER OF SASQUATCH, HOW CAN ALPHA FLIGHT DEFEAT THE HULK?
WE CAN'T, MICHAEL. NOT AT OUR CURRENT STRENGTH.
BUT THERE'S MY OTHER TEAM.

IOWA.
NIGHT IS THE HULK'S TIME. THE MESSAGE FEELS CLEARER NOW, IN MY MIND.
WE'RE GOING HOME.
HIS HOME. HIS PLACE OF POWER.
THE PLACE WHERE HE'S STRONGEST--STRONG ENOUGH TO BEAT WHATEVER'S INSIDE US.
IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE.
THE ROUTE IS SIMPLE ENOUGH. I CAN HITCHHIKE, IF I KEEP TO THE BACK ROADS AND SMALL TOWNS.
HEAD WEST AND SOUTH ACROSS NEBRASKA AND COLORADO, THEN DOWN INTO--
THAT'S NOT A CAR.
HELLO, BRUCE.

CAROL.
ALWAYS A PLEASURE.
OR IS THIS BUSINESS?
THE AVENGERS HAVE BEEN VERY GOOD AT LEAVING ME ALONE SINCE I CAME BACK...
WELL, THE HULK HELPED SAVE THE WORLD, BRUCE. IT EARNED YOU A LOT OF ROPE.
BUT...THAT WAS A VERY DIFFERENT SET OF AVENGERS. AND IF I'M BEING HONEST?
YOUR ROPE'S ABOUT RUN OUT.

HMH.
I'M DISAPPOINTED.
ET TU, JEN?
DISAPPOINTED?
YOU'RE DISAPPOINTED?
JENNIFER...
I ALMOST DIED, BRUCE! I WAS IN A COMA! AND WHEN I WOKE UP, I FOUND OUT YOU--YOU HAD YOURSELF KILLED!
SET YOURSELF UP TO DIE!
YOU KNEW WHAT THAT'D DO TO ME! AND YOU COULDN'T EVEN DO IT YOURSELF!
HAD TO--HAD TO FORCE MY FRIEND--HAD TO GUILT CLINT INTO, INTO DOING THAT--
ONE OF--H-HULK'S OLDEST FRIENDS AND YOU--YOU--YOU KNEW--YOU KNEW--
--KNEW WHAT THAT WOULD DO TO HULK--
JENNIFER.
CONTROL.
H-HULK--KNOWS. I KNOW.
I KNOW.
WE'RE NOT HERE TO HURT YOU, BRUCE. WE CAN HELP YOU. I WANT TO HELP YOU.
BUT RIGHT NOW...I NEED YOU TO COME WITH US.

RIGHT NOW? ARE YOU SURE?
THE SUN'S GONE DOWN. IT'S NIGHT, CAROL.
IT'S HIS TIME.
YES, I'VE SPOKEN TO MS. McGEE, BRUCE. WE'VE STUDIED THE SIGHTINGS. WE KNOW THE PATTERN.
EVERY SIGHTING, IT'S BEEN THE SAME. EVERY SINGLE ONE.
NIGHT IS THE HULK'S TIME.
BUT TO SET THE HULK FREE, BRUCE BANNER HAS TO DIE.
AND THAT'S JUST NOT GOING TO HAPPEN, BRUCE.
...
BUT THAT'S MY SECRET, CAPTAIN.
I'M ALREADY DEAD.

# ACTION/ REACTION

7

“MANY NAMES HATH GOD GIVEN HIM, NAMES OF MYSTERY, SECRET AND TERRIBLE... THE DESTROYER, FOR HIS ARM BREAKETH AND GRINDETH TO PIECES, WHEREFORE THE FEAR AND DREAD OF HIM ARE UPON ALL FLESH. AND THE AVENGER, FOR HE IS THE ANGER OF GOD, HIS BREATH SHALL BURN UP ALL THE SOULS OF THE WICKED.”

– ANNA KINGSFORD
*CLOTHED WITH THE SUN*

IOWA.
"GOTTA USE THE MEGA-LASER, CAPTAIN MARVEL!"
"DON'T DO IT, IRON MAN!"
"I GOTTA! WE GOT NO CHOICE!"
WHOOSH!
JULIAN--
--WE GOTTA GO, BUDDY. OKAY?
BUT IRON MAN'S FIRIN' THE MEGA-LASER--
TODD, LET HIM TAKE HIS TOYS--
SURE. BUT WE HAVE TO GO, OKAY, PAL?
WE HAVE TO GO RIGHT NOW.

THE EVACUATION POINT'S OUT AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL...

WAIT--WE CAN'T JUST LEAVE LIKE THIS--

GREEN ALERT MEANS DROP EVERYTHING AND RUN, HONEY. WE TOOK TOO LONG AS IT IS--

WE NEED TO LOCK UP-- THE DOOR'S WIDE--

--OPEN--

UNNHH--

TH-THAT--

THAT WAS A CAR--THAT WAS A SKELETON IN A CAR--

MICHELLE! HENRY!

RUN!

"FOR THOSE JUST JOINING US--"

--A LEVEL THREE SUPERHUMAN CONFLICT IS CURRENTLY RAGING AT THE EDGE OF GEORGEVILLE, IOWA, BETWEEN THE AVENGERS--

--AND WHAT EYEWITNESSES ARE SAYING IS THE HULK.

DESPITE SOME NEAR MISSES, THERE HAVE BEEN NO CASUALTIES AS OF YET--

MTN
WORLD TV NEWS

"--BUT OBVIOUSLY, THAT COULD CHANGE."
KRAK
B-BY ODIN...
DADDY CAN'T HELP YOU NOW--
THOR-- BEHIND ME!
LOOK! IT'S CAPTAIN HYDRA!
WHEN I RIP OFF YOUR HEAD, WILL TWO MORE TAKE ITS PLACE?
TWANG
THAT...
...WASN'T ME...
CAPTAIN-- SEE TO THOR.

I CAN TAKE IT FROM HERE.
HEY! GET OFF ME, YOU LITTLE--
PERHAPS THIS WILL BRING HIM TO HIS SENSES.
ARRRHH!
LET'S HOPE.
IF NOT--I'VE GOT OUR BIG GUN PARKED AT 10,000 FEET.
ONLY IF WE NEED IT, MY FRIEND.
SOME WEAPONS SHOULD REMAIN THE LAST RESORT--
--AND CODE: HELIOS IS ONE OF THEM.

YOU OKAY? I'M NOT SURE I'VE EVER SEEN YOU GET HIT THAT HARD...
HE...HE IS STRONGER THAN HE WAS.
VASTLY SO.
HE...HE SEES THE NAKED SOULS OF MEN...SMELLS THE LIES IN OUR HEARTS, HIDDEN EVEN FROM OURSELVES...
YOU...YOU MIGHT HAVE A CONCUSSION, THOR. YOU'RE RAMBLING.
LIES DON'T HAVE A SMELL--
ARE YOU SURE?
YOU LIVE IN THE MORTAL WORLD, STEVE ROGERS...OF SCIENCE AND LAW, OF WHAT YOU CAN PERCEIVE...
...BUT I LIVE IN A WORLD OF LEGEND AND SYMBOL. THE WORLD OF THE GODS.
THOR-- ARE YOU SUGGESTING--
I AM SUGGESTING, CAPTAIN...THAT IN ITS RAGE, ITS PAIN, IN THE SHADOW OF ITS ARMAGEDDON...
...YOUR MORTAL WORLD MAY HAVE PRODUCED SOMETHING VERY CLOSE TO A GOD.
OR A DEVIL, PERHAPS.

HNH.
"DEVIL HULK."
WORKS FOR ME.
WHAMMM
WARNING
OH NO--
CRITICAL DAMAGE
EVASIVE ACTION REQUIRED
EVADE
EVADE
EVADE THIS!
WARNING
CATASTROPHIC DAMAGE

CASCADE FAIL#RE IMM%NENT
EJECT!
MOTHERBOARD-- I SAID EJECT--
EJECT, DAMMIT--
BANNER-- ENOUGH! STARK WILL DIE UNLESS WE GET HIM OUT OF THERE!
THE MAN IS YOUR FRIEND--
MY FRIEND?
"PERHAPS THIS WILL BRING YOU TO YOUR SENSES."
KRAAM
TOT%L C#%CADE %AIL&RE IN THREE TW%
COME ON-- LAUNCH MANUAL RELEASE--
DON'T JAM, DON'T JAM, DON'T--

BOOM
TONY STARK TO ALL POINTS-- I'M ALIVE. SOMEHOW.
BUT THE NEW HULKBUSTER'S A TOTAL WRITE-OFF, AND...
...AND I DON'T THINK WE'RE GOING TO WIN THIS ONE.
NOT WITHOUT COST.
I'M UNLOCKING THE BIG GUN, GUYS.
I'M PREPPING CODE: HELIOS.
TONY-- NO.
THIS IS A CIVILIAN AREA--
THE CIVILIANS ARE GOING TO BE OUT OF THE AREA, CAROL.

WE SPLIT OUR FORCES TO MAKE CERTAIN OF THAT, REMEMBER?

ANYONE CAN PUNCH, BUT ONLY CAPTAIN MARVEL CAN ORGANIZE PUTTING A THOUSAND PEOPLE ON ALPHA FLIGHT TRANSPORTS--

IT'S MORE THAN THE PEOPLE, TONY.

THERE ARE HOMES HERE-- BUSINESSES--

I'M WITH CAROL, TONY. LET'S SAVE CODE: HELIOS UNTIL WE'RE OUT OF OPTIONS.

I'M NOT SEEING MOVEMENT HERE--IT'S POSSIBLE THE HULK WAS TAKEN OUT IN THE--

--BLAST.

I CAN... STILL FIGHT HIM...ONCE...

...ONCE MY TROLL-DAMNED VISION CLEARS...

WHEN THE TIME COMES, SOLDIER.

FOR NOW-- WE FALL BACK.

EVERYONE-- GET OUT OF RANGE! WE MIGHT NEED THE HELIOS GUN YET!

AND JEN--I'M SORRY.

I DIDN'T WANT IT TO COME TO THIS-- BUT IT'S TIME.

"YOU'RE UP."

HUH?

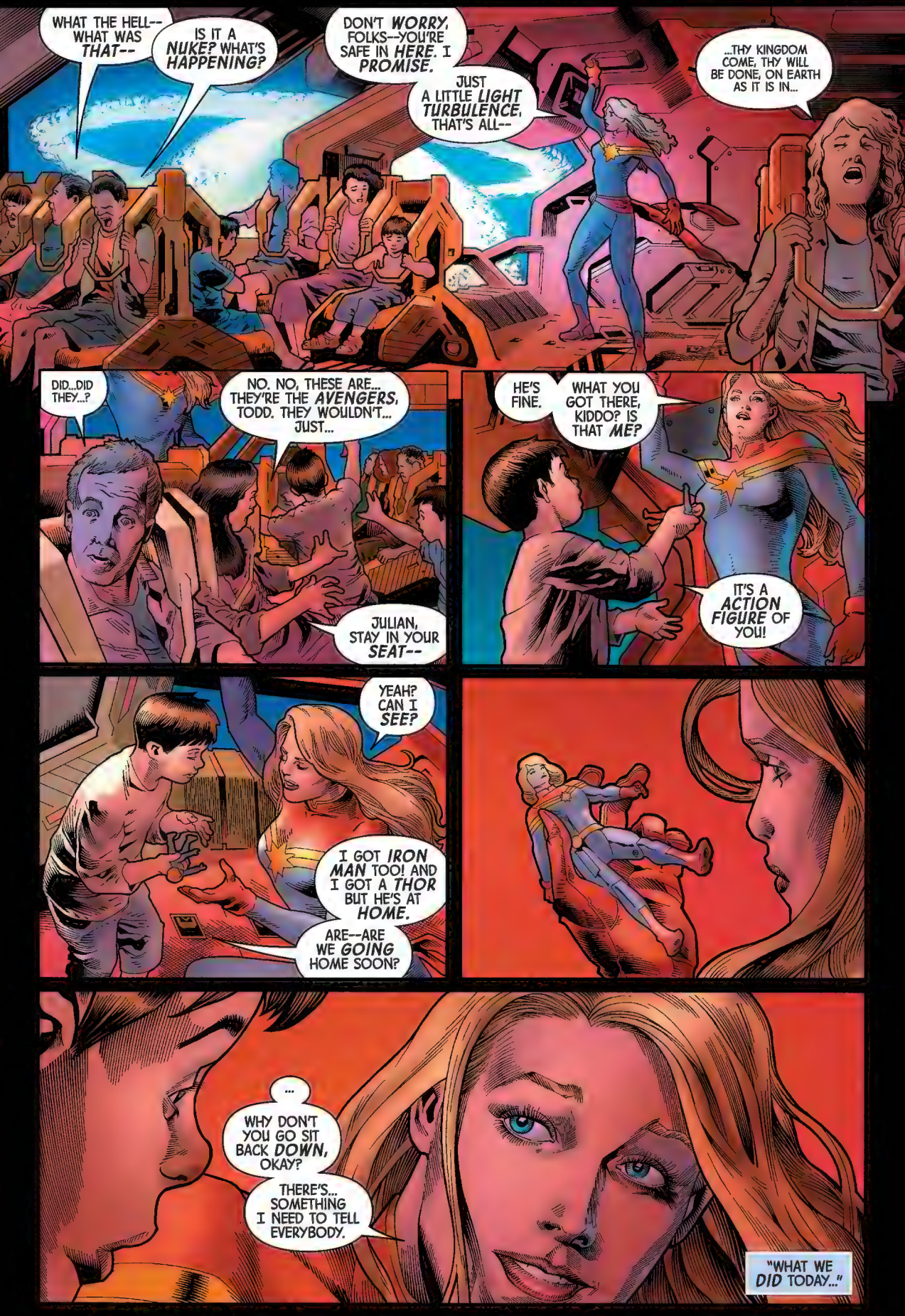
HULK!

SMASH!

BRUCE HURT JEN! HURT HIS FRIENDS!
HURT US ALL!
SO NOW-- NOW--
AND THE MADDER YOU GET...RIGHT?
FUNNY HOW THAT WORKS...
NOW YOU'RE MAD.
THWAPP
SEE--I WAS EVERYTHING BANNER WANTED TO HIDE. EVERYTHING HE PRETENDED HE WASN'T.
YOU WERE EVERYTHING WALTERS WANTED TO SHOW THE WORLD SHE WAS.
ONLY NOW THAT LINE BETWEEN US IS HARDER TO SEE, AIN'T IT?
WHAT DO YOU THINK...
SHUT UP!
HULK SMASH YOU-- SMASH--
...HULK?
NO--
HULK IS NOT--I'M NOT LIKE YOU--

HNH.
GOTCHA.
"HE GOT JEN.
WHAMMM
"SHE'S A MILE AWAY ALREADY--TWO--SHE'S GOING TO LAND HARD--"
--HE'LL KILL SOMEONE SOON, CAROL. I SWEAR TO GOD, THAT'S HOW THIS ENDS.
ARE THE CIVILIANS OUT OF THE BLAST RANGE YET? ARE WE?
NO LIFE SIGNS IN RANGE ASIDE FROM BANNER--BUT TONY, THIS ISN'T--
THEN IT'S SETTLED. CROSS YOUR FINGERS--THIS IS A ONE-SHOT WEAPON, WE CAN'T USE IT TWICE--
TONY--DON'T DO THIS--
CAROL... WE HAVE NO CHOICE.
SYSTEMS GREEN...

...FIRING THE *HELIOS LASER.*


WHAT THE HELL-- WHAT WAS THAT--
IS IT A NUKE? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
DON'T WORRY, FOLKS--YOU'RE SAFE IN HERE. I PROMISE.
JUST A LITTLE LIGHT TURBULENCE, THAT'S ALL--
...THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN...
DID...DID THEY...?
NO. NO, THESE ARE... THEY'RE THE AVENGERS, TODD. THEY WOULDN'T... JUST...
JULIAN, STAY IN YOUR SEAT--
HE'S FINE.
WHAT YOU GOT THERE, KIDDO? IS THAT ME?
IT'S A ACTION FIGURE OF YOU!
YEAH? CAN I SEE?
I GOT IRON MAN TOO! AND I GOT A THOR BUT HE'S AT HOME.
ARE--ARE WE GOING HOME SOON?
...
WHY DON'T YOU GO SIT BACK DOWN, OKAY?
THERE'S... SOMETHING I NEED TO TELL EVERYBODY.
"WHAT WE DID TODAY..."

...IT'S NOT RIGHT, T'CHALLA. NOT RIGHT AT ALL.
I ONLY HOPE IT DIDN'T HURT TOO MUCH--
IT ALMOST DEFINITELY DID.
THE HELIOS LASER WAS LACED WITH UV RADIATION-- EFFECTIVELY, IT WAS A BEAM OF HARD SUNLIGHT.
IT WAS THE ONE THING WE HAD ON HAND THAT COULD HURT THIS NEW "DEVIL HULK" PERSONA--
DON'T CALL HIM THAT.
THIS WASN'T THE DEVIL, TONY.
THIS WAS A FRIEND IN NEED.
AND WE KILLED HIM...
AS A TEMPORARY MEASURE ONLY, CAPTAIN.
BRUCE BANNER MAY BE DEAD, BUT I SUSPECT THAT WITHOUT THESE UV DRONES-- SUN LAMPS, FOR WANT OF A BETTER TERM-- --THE HULK WOULD SOON RISE AGAIN.

BACK FROM DEATH. RESTED. REFRESHED.
WOULD WE SURVIVE THAT, CAPTAIN?
"GHOST RIDER AND HIS VEHICLE ARE HEALED, BUT THOR'S FRACTURED SKULL WILL NEED FURTHER TREATMENT--
"--THE HEALING MAGICS OF HIS PEOPLE.
"WE FOUND JENNIFER--SHE'S ALIVE AND RELATIVELY UNINJURED--
"--BUT SHE WON'T SAY WHAT IT WAS THE HULK SAID TO HER."
LET'S NOT FORGET HE ALMOST KILLED ME...
AND ME. HE OVERLOADED THE VIBRANIUM IN MY SUIT--ALMOST AN IMPOSSIBILITY.
WITHOUT THE HELIOS WEAPON--WITHOUT THIS SACRIFICE--WE'D BE BURYING OUR OWN DEAD TONIGHT, CAPTAIN.
MY CONSCIENCE REMAINS CLEAR.
GOOD FOR YOU, YOUR HIGHNESS.
WE'VE GOT ANOTHER PROBLEM, ANYWAY. WE BEAT HIM...WE'VE GOT HIM...

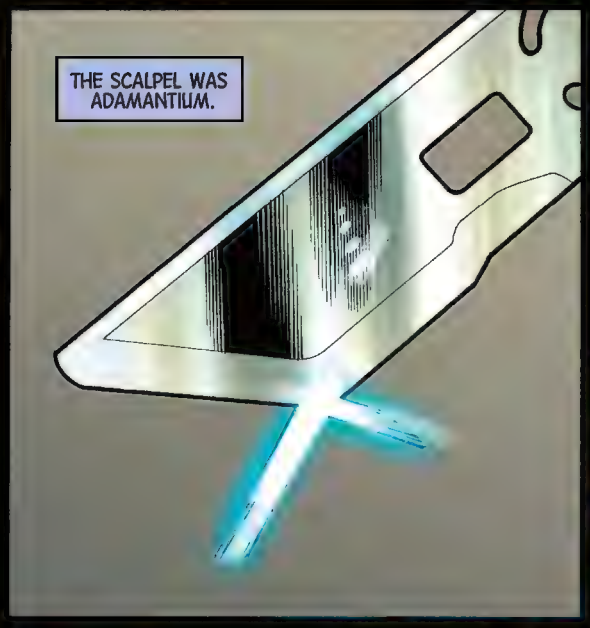
"...NOW WHAT DO WE *DO* WITH HIM?"
IN THE END...WHAT *COULD* THEY DO?
THERE WERE *PROTOCOLS* TO FOLLOW. EVEN THE *AVENGERS* CAN'T FIGHT *CITY HALL.*
SO ROGERS HANDED YOU TO *SECRETARY ROSS*... AND ROSS, HAVING *DELEGATED* COMMAND OF HULK OPERATIONS, PASSED YOU STRAIGHT ON TO *US.*
AND WE MADE YOU NICE AND *COMFY* IN TIME FOR THE NEXT *SUNSET.*
HONESTLY? I DIDN'T THINK IT'D BE THIS *EASY.*
I THOUGHT WE'D HAVE TO USE UP AN *ASSET* OR TWO. PUT OUR *AGENTS* IN PLAY. WORK UP A *SWEAT.*
BUT JUST A *LITTLE* PRESSURE APPLIED TO THE RIGHT *PEOPLE,* AND...WELL, HERE YOU ARE.
RIGHT WHERE WE *WANT* YOU.
WELCOME TO *SHADOW BASE,* BANNER. I WANT YOU TO THINK OF WHAT'S *COMING* AS...A LITTLE POETIC *VENGEANCE.*
SEE, YOU'VE CAUSED A LOT OF PEOPLE A LOT OF *PAIN* OVER THE YEARS...AND *NOW...*

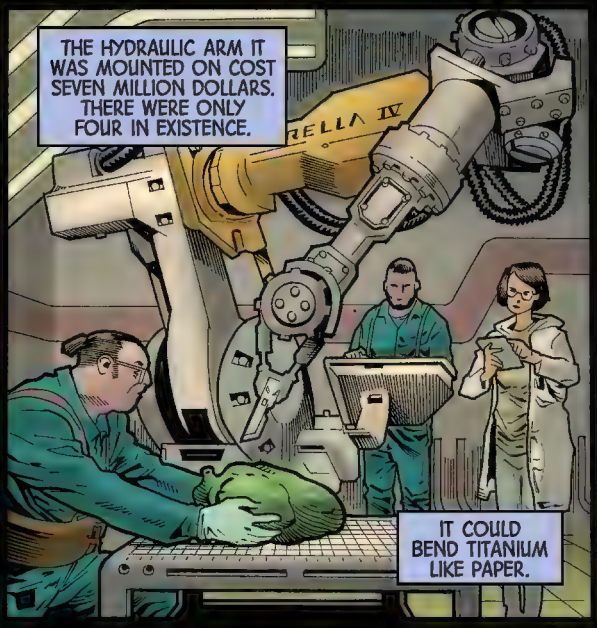
# THE AVENGERS

8

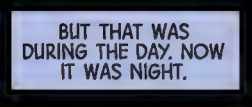
“Did he who made the lamb make thee?”

– WILLIAM BLAKE
“THE TYGER”

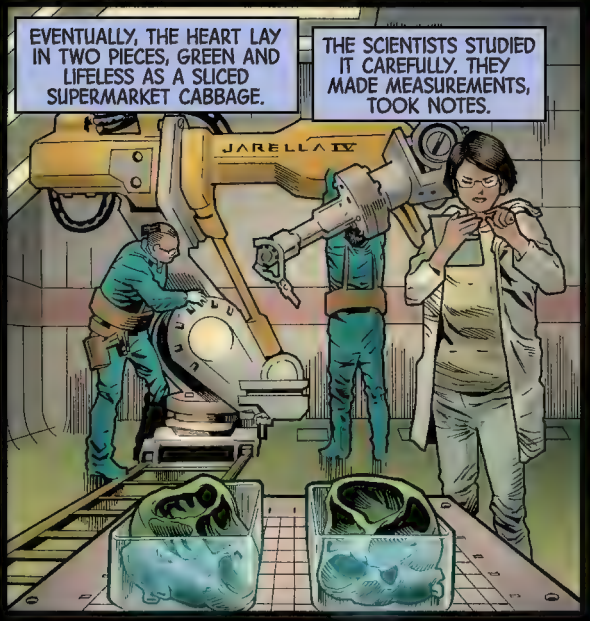

THE SCALPEL WAS ADAMANTIUM.


THE HYDRAULIC ARM IT WAS MOUNTED ON COST SEVEN MILLION DOLLARS. THERE WERE ONLY FOUR IN EXISTENCE.
IT COULD BEND TITANIUM LIKE PAPER.

EVEN SO, IT WHINED DANGEROUSLY AS THE BLADE BIT THROUGH THE INTERVENTRICULAR SEPTUM.
WHEN THE HEART WAS *RED*, THEY'D EXTRACTED IT WITH EASE.


BUT THAT WAS DURING THE DAY. NOW IT WAS NIGHT.

THE NIGHT WAS *HIS* TIME.


EVENTUALLY, THE HEART LAY IN TWO PIECES, GREEN AND LIFELESS AS A SLICED SUPERMARKET CABBAGE.
THE SCIENTISTS STUDIED IT CAREFULLY. THEY MADE MEASUREMENTS, TOOK NOTES.

THEN THEY WHEELED IT BACK TO JOIN THE REST OF HIM.

AND SOMEWHERE ALONG THE NORTH CORRIDOR...

...JUST PAST THE WATER COOLER, BEFORE THE HAMSTER RUN...

...THE SUNDERED HEART BEGAN TO *BEAT.*

THRMM THRMM

"VILLAINS, DISSEMBLE *NO MORE!* I *ADMIT* THE DEED!

"IT IS THE BEATING OF HIS *HIDEOUS HEART!"*

THRMM THRMM

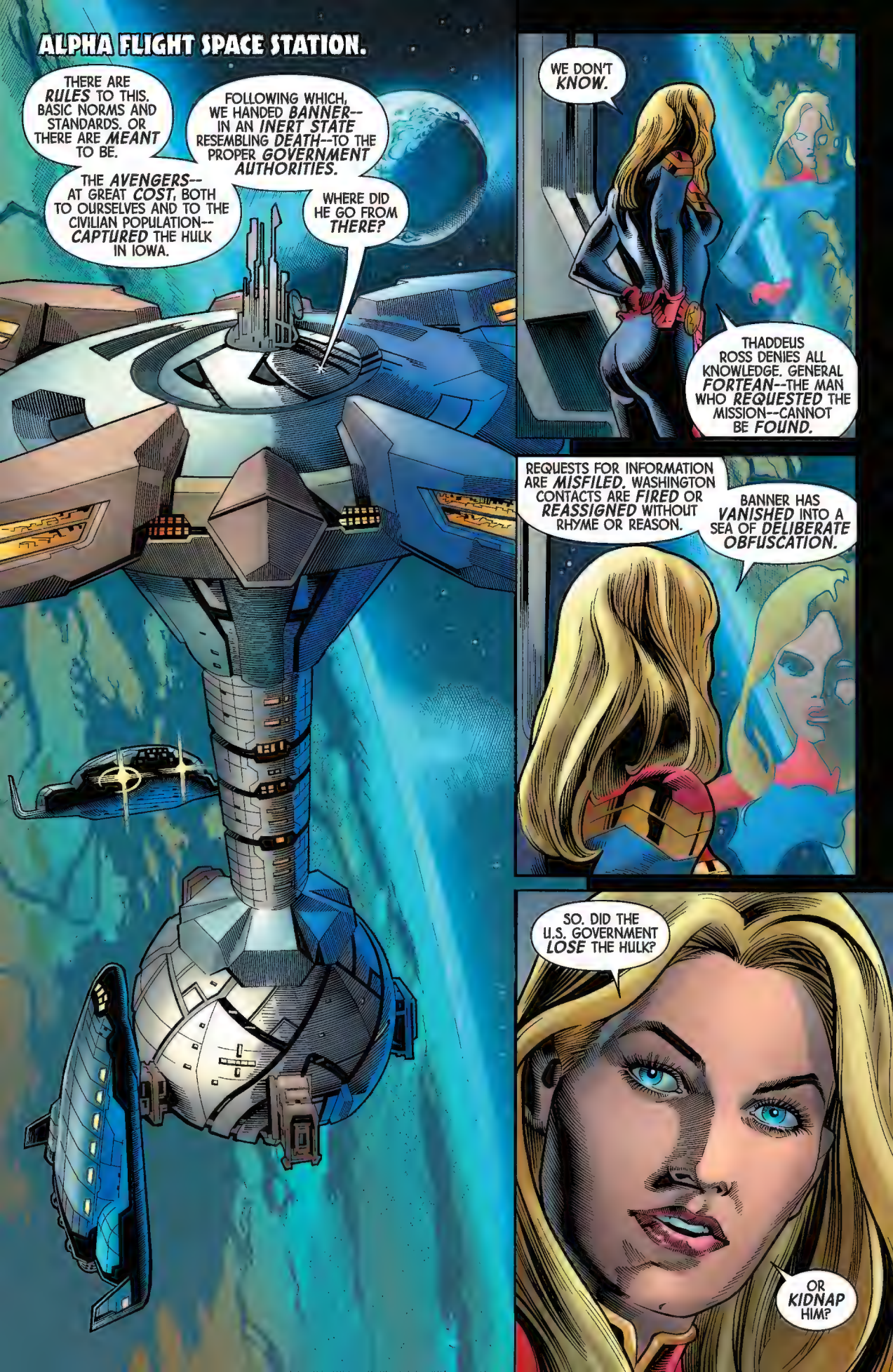
SO. WHAT'S THE *SCIENCE* HERE?

ANY *IDEAS?*

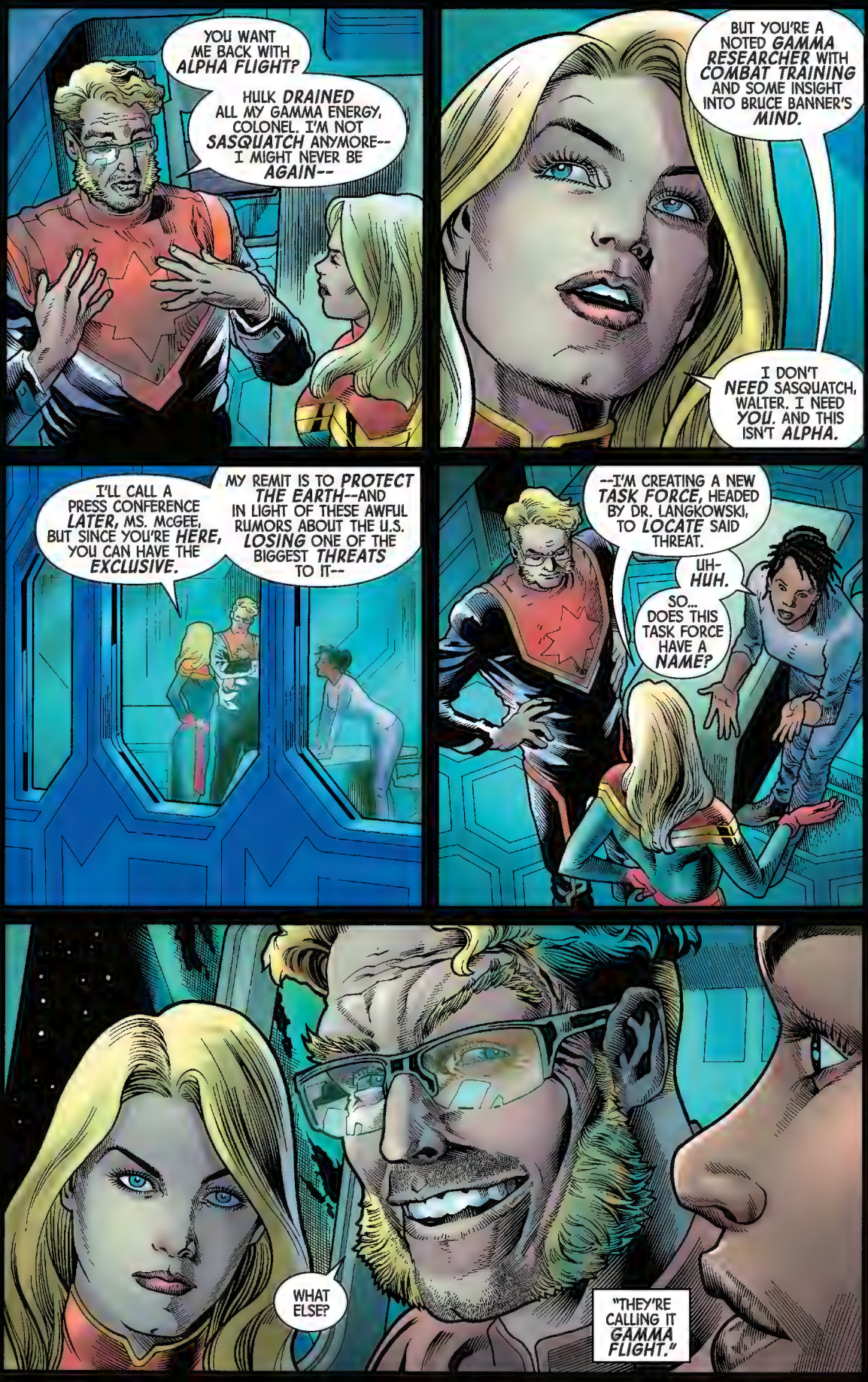
SHADOW BASE.

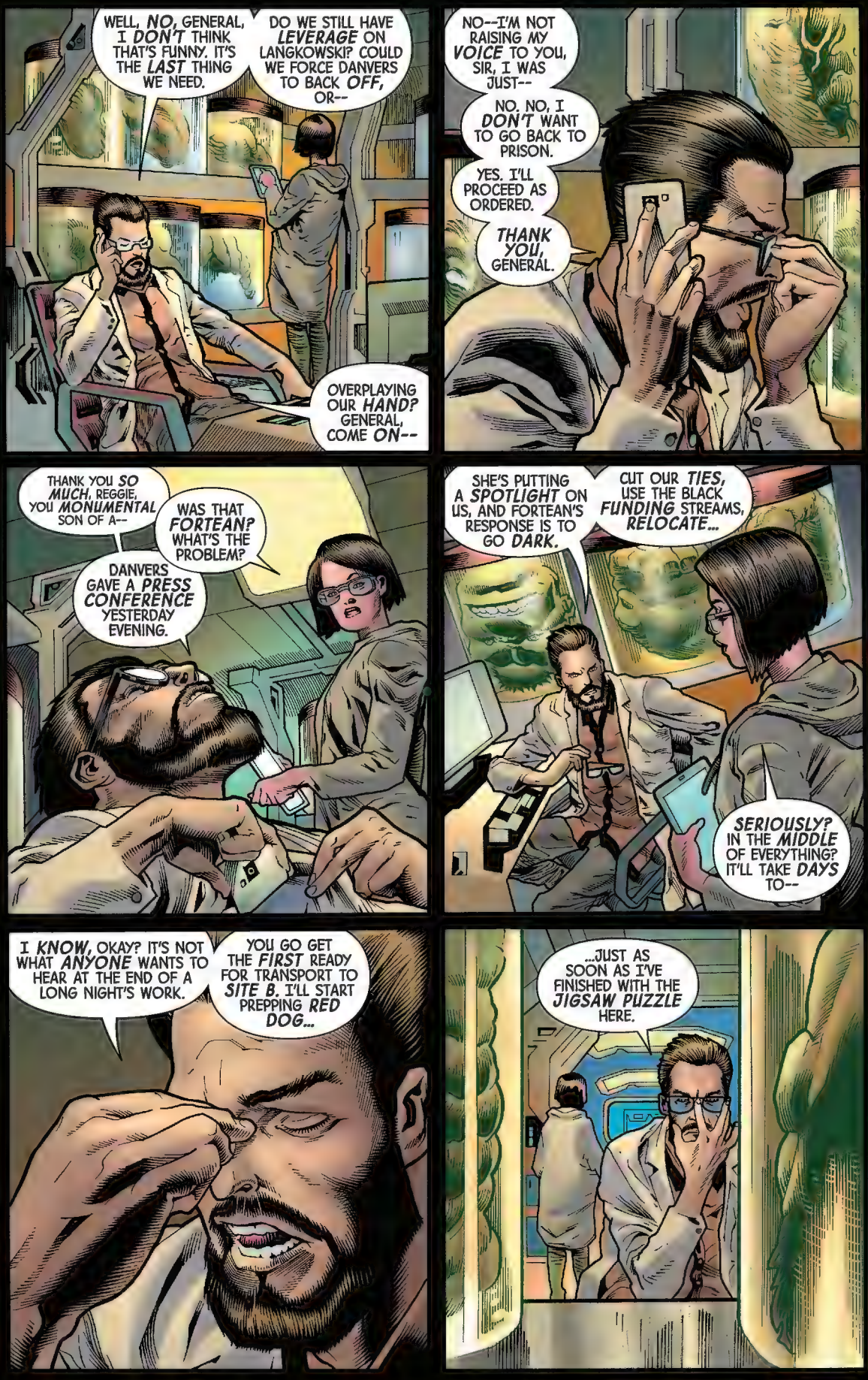
NOT YOU, BIG GUY.
I MEAN, LOOK AT YOU. TRYING TO TALK WITH NO AIR IN YOUR LUNGS. NO LUNGS.
SCIENCE ISN'T YOUR SPECIALTY, IS IT?
...
CHARMING.
A LITTLE DECORUM, PLEASE, HULK. BE CIVIL.
NOW, SOMEONE HAND ME HIS HEART. I WANT TO PLAY WITH IT A LITTLE.
DR. CLIVE, WE DO NEED TO RUN MORE TESTS BEFORE--
THIS IS A TEST. I'M IN THE MOMENT, CHARLENE.
LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I...
OH.
WELL, ISN'T THAT INTERESTING.
SHLURK

GOOD AS NEW. DEAD MEAT ON THE TABLE, ALIVE AGAIN WHEN IT'S NEAR HIM. AND IT HEALS. REGENERATES.
I HAVE QUESTIONS. DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, CHARLENE?
WHY NOT FULL REGENERATION?
EXACTLY. A LITTLE BABY BODY ON A BIG HULK HEAD, OR A NEW HULK SPROUTING FROM EVERY ORGAN. HULK SEEDS.
WHY THIS AND NOT THAT?
PSIONIC LINK, MAYBE? AUTONOMIC CONTROL OVER THE INDIVIDUAL CELLS?
NOPE. ZERO PSI ACTIVITY.
PLUS HE HAD HIS HYPOTHALAMUS DESTROYED AND HE CAME BACK FROM THAT.
THAT'S THE KEY TO ALL OF IT. HOW DOES HE COME BACK? WHAT'S THE SCIENCE? WHAT ARE THE RULES?
WE HAVE TO KNOW THE RULES.
OTHERWISE HOW CAN WE BREAK THEM?


ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
THERE ARE RULES TO THIS. BASIC NORMS AND STANDARDS. OR THERE ARE MEANT TO BE.
FOLLOWING WHICH, WE HANDED BANNER--IN AN INERT STATE RESEMBLING DEATH--TO THE PROPER GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES.
THE AVENGERS--AT GREAT COST, BOTH TO OURSELVES AND TO THE CIVILIAN POPULATION--CAPTURED THE HULK IN IOWA.
WHERE DID HE GO FROM THERE?
WE DON'T KNOW.
THADDEUS ROSS DENIES ALL KNOWLEDGE. GENERAL FORTEAN--THE MAN WHO REQUESTED THE MISSION--CANNOT BE FOUND.
REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION ARE MISFILED. WASHINGTON CONTACTS ARE FIRED OR REASSIGNED WITHOUT RHYME OR REASON.
BANNER HAS VANISHED INTO A SEA OF DELIBERATE OBFUSCATION.
SO. DID THE U.S. GOVERNMENT LOSE THE HULK?
OR KIDNAP HIM?

AND JUST TO CHECK, COLONEL DANVERS--I CAN QUOTE THAT, BUT ONLY AS AN ANONYMOUS SOURCE?
IT'LL HAVE TO BE, UNFORTUNATELY.
OFF THE RECORD-- ALPHA FLIGHT DOESN'T HAVE THE BANDWIDTH FOR OPEN WAR WITH THIS ADMINISTRATION. NOT ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE.
BUT THE BAD PRESS SHOULD PUT PRESSURE ON WHERE IT COUNTS. GET BANNER'S CAPTORS ANTSY.
GET THEM TO MAKE A MISTAKE.
IF THEY MOVE HIM, MAYBE WE CAN LOCATE HIM AGAIN--
IF HE'S ABOVE GROUND.
AND IF HIS GAMMA SIGNATURE HASN'T CHANGED.
FOR ALL WE KNOW, HE CAN ALTER IT AT WILL.
WE STILL DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT BRUCE IS CAPABLE OF WHEN HE'S CORNERED OR WOUNDED.
AND IF THIS... HORROR...HAS TAUGHT ME ANYTHING...
...IT'S THAT GAMMA MUTATION CAN NEVER BE PREDICTED.
WELL, YOU'RE THE EXPERT.
YOUR LEAVE OF ABSENCE IS OVER, WALTER. YOU'RE BACK ON ACTIVE DUTY AS OF NOW.


YOU WANT ME BACK WITH ALPHA FLIGHT?
HULK DRAINED ALL MY GAMMA ENERGY, COLONEL. I'M NOT SASQUATCH ANYMORE-- I MIGHT NEVER BE AGAIN--
BUT YOU'RE A NOTED GAMMA RESEARCHER WITH COMBAT TRAINING AND SOME INSIGHT INTO BRUCE BANNER'S MIND.
I DON'T NEED SASQUATCH, WALTER. I NEED YOU. AND THIS ISN'T ALPHA.
I'LL CALL A PRESS CONFERENCE LATER, MS. McGEE, BUT SINCE YOU'RE HERE, YOU CAN HAVE THE EXCLUSIVE.
MY REMIT IS TO PROTECT THE EARTH--AND IN LIGHT OF THESE AWFUL RUMORS ABOUT THE U.S. LOSING ONE OF THE BIGGEST THREATS TO IT--
--I'M CREATING A NEW TASK FORCE, HEADED BY DR. LANGKOWSKI, TO LOCATE SAID THREAT.
UH-HUH.
SO... DOES THIS TASK FORCE HAVE A NAME?
WHAT ELSE?
"THEY'RE CALLING IT GAMMA FLIGHT."


WELL, NO, GENERAL, I DON'T THINK THAT'S FUNNY. IT'S THE LAST THING WE NEED.
DO WE STILL HAVE LEVERAGE ON LANGKOWSKI? COULD WE FORCE DANVERS TO BACK OFF, OR--
OVERPLAYING OUR HAND? GENERAL, COME ON--
NO--I'M NOT RAISING MY VOICE TO YOU, SIR, I WAS JUST--
NO, NO, I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO PRISON.
YES. I'LL PROCEED AS ORDERED.
THANK YOU, GENERAL.
THANK YOU SO MUCH, REGGIE, YOU MONUMENTAL SON OF A--
WAS THAT FORTEAN? WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
DANVERS GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY EVENING.
SHE'S PUTTING A SPOTLIGHT ON US, AND FORTEAN'S RESPONSE IS TO GO DARK.
CUT OUR TIES, USE THE BLACK FUNDING STREAMS, RELOCATE...
SERIOUSLY? IN THE MIDDLE OF EVERYTHING? IT'LL TAKE DAYS TO--
I KNOW, OKAY? IT'S NOT WHAT ANYONE WANTS TO HEAR AT THE END OF A LONG NIGHT'S WORK.
YOU GO GET THE FIRST READY FOR TRANSPORT TO SITE B. I'LL START PREPPING RED DOG...
...JUST AS SOON AS I'VE FINISHED WITH THE JIGSAW PUZZLE HERE.

...
YOU THINK THAT'S FUNNY?
THAT YOUR SUPER HERO BUDDIES WANT TO MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT?
DIFFICULT FOR YOU, MY FRIEND. EVERYTHING WE'VE DONE TO YOU HERE-- THAT WAS JUST THE START.
WHAT HAPPENS NOW IS WE SHIP THESE PIECES OF YOU TO OUR OTHER SITES. STUDY THEM CELL BY CELL.
CUT THAT SMILE OFF YOU. SLICE IT DOWN TO THE BONE.
MAYBE--MAYBE WE'LL POP ONE OF YOUR EYES, HUH? LIKE A--LIKE A WATER BALLOON!
RIP OUT THE OTHER! SEE WHAT GROWS BACK!
NEEDLES IN YOUR--YOUR TONGUE, AND--
W-WE'RE GOING TO-- TO--
WE'RE EXPERIMENTING ON YOU, YOU MORON! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

WE'RE GOING TO TURN YOU INTO OUR WEAPON!
LEARN ALL YOUR SECRETS!
HOW YOUR HEART BEATS! HOW YOUR FINGERS MOVE!
ALL OF IT!
WE'RE GOING TO FIND OUT EXACTLY--
--WHAT YOU CAN DO.
OH GOD.
YOU LET US DO THIS. YOU WANTED US TO... TO TEST YOU.
BECAUSE IF WE KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO...
...SO DO YOU.
SNAP

PLEASE!

I WAS-- PLEASE, I WAS *TOLD* TO, I'M *SORRY*--

I'M *SORRY*-- I'M--

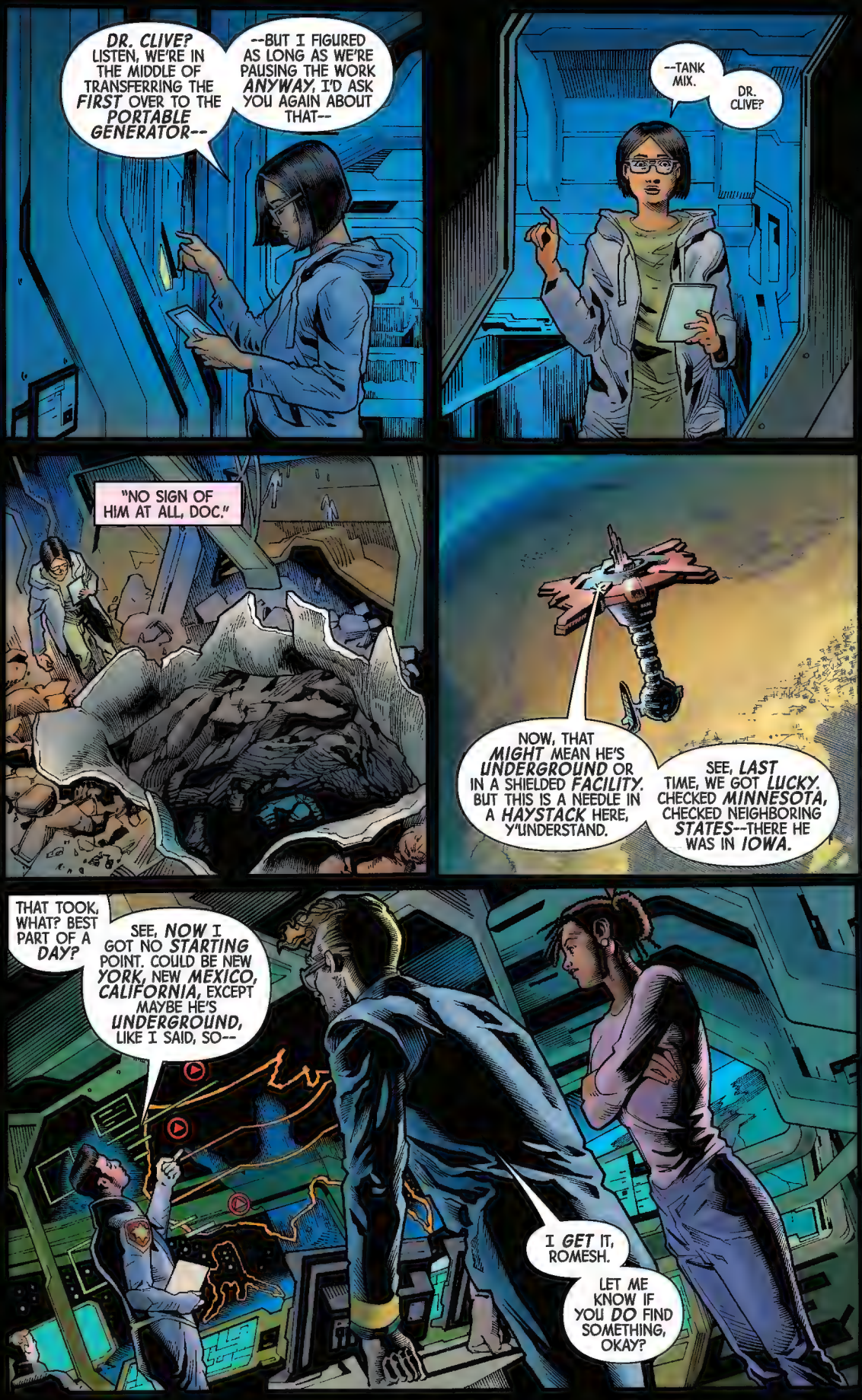
--SURRHHGGK--

HHGG

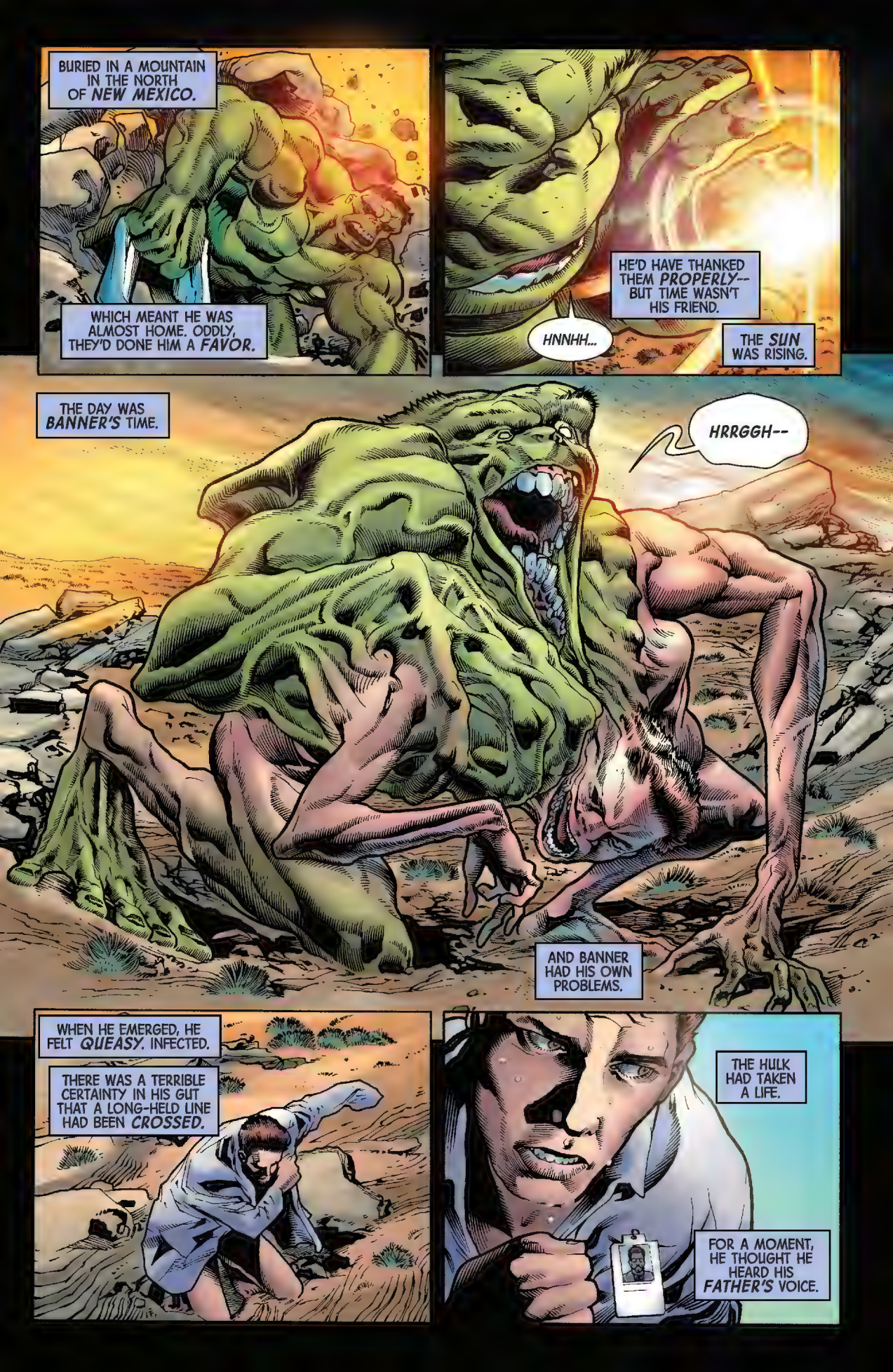
GLK

PLSS

HNH.
NOT SORRY ENOUGH.
YOU WANTED SCIENCE. YOU WANTED A SET OF RULES.
FROM ME.
BIG MISTAKE. SEE...SCIENCE IS THE OTHER GUY.
AND WHEN YOU HURT HIM...
...I TAKE IT PERSONAL.


DR. CLIVE? LISTEN, WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF TRANSFERRING THE FIRST OVER TO THE PORTABLE GENERATOR--
--BUT I FIGURED AS LONG AS WE'RE PAUSING THE WORK ANYWAY, I'D ASK YOU AGAIN ABOUT THAT--
--TANK MIX.
DR. CLIVE?
"NO SIGN OF HIM AT ALL, DOC."
NOW, THAT MIGHT MEAN HE'S UNDERGROUND OR IN A SHIELDED FACILITY. BUT THIS IS A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK HERE, Y'UNDERSTAND.
SEE, LAST TIME, WE GOT LUCKY. CHECKED MINNESOTA, CHECKED NEIGHBORING STATES--THERE HE WAS IN IOWA.
THAT TOOK, WHAT? BEST PART OF A DAY?
SEE, NOW I GOT NO STARTING POINT. COULD BE NEW YORK, NEW MEXICO, CALIFORNIA, EXCEPT MAYBE HE'S UNDERGROUND, LIKE I SAID, SO--
I GET IT, ROMESH.
LET ME KNOW IF YOU DO FIND SOMETHING, OKAY?

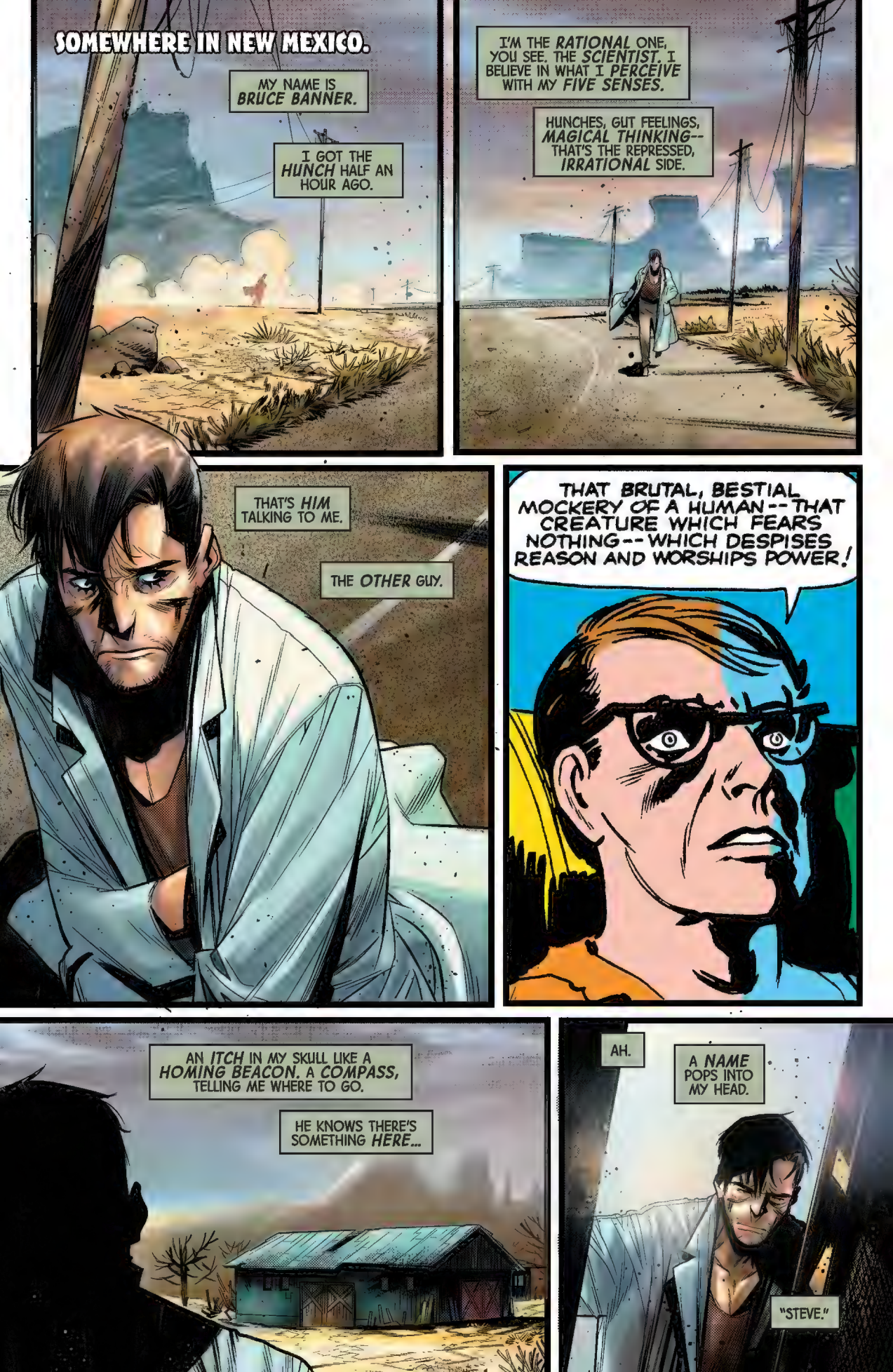
OOF. LOOKS LIKE THIS MIGHT TAKE A WHILE.
UNLESS WE CAN THINK OF ANOTHER WAY TO FIND HIM...
UH... I'M SORRY, "WE"?
SURE. I COULD USE YOUR HELP.
I MEAN, YOU'VE BEEN CHASING THE HULK ACROSS THE COUNTRY FOR MONTHS NOW--
SURE, BUT NOT AS...WHATEVER THIS "GAMMA FLIGHT" IS. WHAT ARE YOU RIGHT NOW? A SUPER HERO? A SECRET AGENT?
I'M A REPORTER, I CAN'T BE THE STORY--
SO BE AN EMBEDDED REPORTER.
LOOK, THIS IS A WAY TO GET THE STORY, JACKIE. I KNOW YOU'VE STILL GOT QUESTIONS FOR HIM.
"AND I KNOW HE HASN'T GIVEN YOU THE ANSWERS. AND HE WON'T.
"UNTIL WE FIND HIM."
KRAKOOM
HE'D BEEN UNDERGROUND.


BURIED IN A MOUNTAIN IN THE NORTH OF NEW MEXICO.
WHICH MEANT HE WAS ALMOST HOME. ODDLY, THEY'D DONE HIM A FAVOR.
HNNHH...
HE'D HAVE THANKED THEM PROPERLY-- BUT TIME WASN'T HIS FRIEND.
THE SUN WAS RISING.
THE DAY WAS BANNER'S TIME.
HRRGGH--
AND BANNER HAD HIS OWN PROBLEMS.
WHEN HE EMERGED, HE FELT QUEASY. INFECTED.
THERE WAS A TERRIBLE CERTAINTY IN HIS GUT THAT A LONG-HELD LINE HAD BEEN CROSSED.
THE HULK HAD TAKEN A LIFE.
FOR A MOMENT, HE THOUGHT HE HEARD HIS FATHER'S VOICE.

# HIS HIDEOUS HEART

IMMORTAL HULK:
BEST DEFENSE

BUT, WHEN THE MASK IS REMOVED...
THIS IS CRAZY! HE'S GOT THE SAME FACE UNDERNEATH!
BETTER TAKE HIM TO HQ! IT'S TOO MUCH FOR US!
10


SOMEWHERE IN NEW MEXICO.
MY NAME IS BRUCE BANNER.
I GOT THE HUNCH HALF AN HOUR AGO.
I'M THE RATIONAL ONE, YOU SEE. THE SCIENTIST. I BELIEVE IN WHAT I PERCEIVE WITH MY FIVE SENSES.
HUNCHES, GUT FEELINGS, MAGICAL THINKING-- THAT'S THE REPRESSED, IRRATIONAL SIDE.
THAT'S HIM TALKING TO ME.
THE OTHER GUY.
THAT BRUTAL, BESTIAL MOCKERY OF A HUMAN--THAT CREATURE WHICH FEARS NOTHING--WHICH DESPISES REASON AND WORSHIPS POWER!
AN ITCH IN MY SKULL LIKE A HOMING BEACON. A COMPASS, TELLING ME WHERE TO GO.
HE KNOWS THERE'S SOMETHING HERE...
AH.
A NAME POPS INTO MY HEAD.
"STEVE."

# THE FACE UNDERNEATH

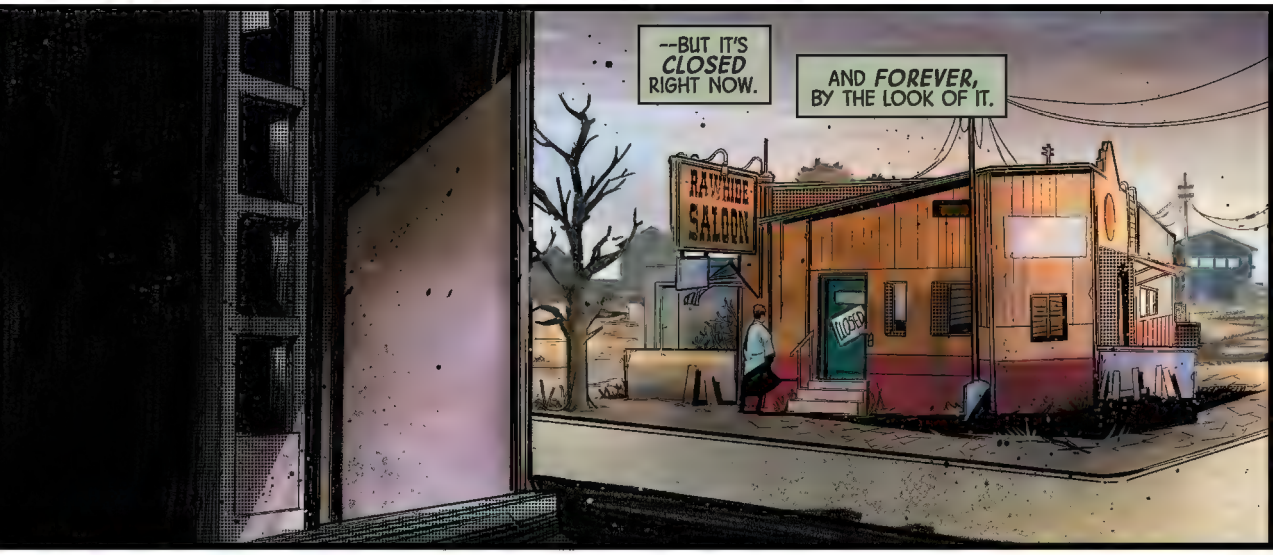
IT'S DEFINITELY HIM.
HE'S BEEN BURNED TO THE BONE... AND SOMETHING'S MISSING FROM THE BODY.
THE AMULET HE ALWAYS WORE-- IT'S NOT HERE.
THE EYE OF SOMETHING... AGAMEMNON...
...THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO.
DOCTOR STRANGE'S TALISMAN. IT SAW THE TRUTH LOCKED INSIDE PEOPLE. IT COULD TEAR OUT WHAT WAS HIDDEN...
...AND THAT'S MORE THAN MOTIVE ENOUGH FOR MURDER.
STEVE AND I HAD OUR DISAGREEMENTS. SOMETIMES VIOLENT ONES.
BUT HE ALWAYS LET ME STAY AT HIS HOUSE-- AND THAT'S NO SMALL THING TO A MAN WITHOUT A HOME.
STEVE...WAS A FRIEND OF MINE.
AND SOMEONE KILLED HIM OVER A FIST-SIZED CHUNK OF METAL.
THAT MAKES ME ANGRY.

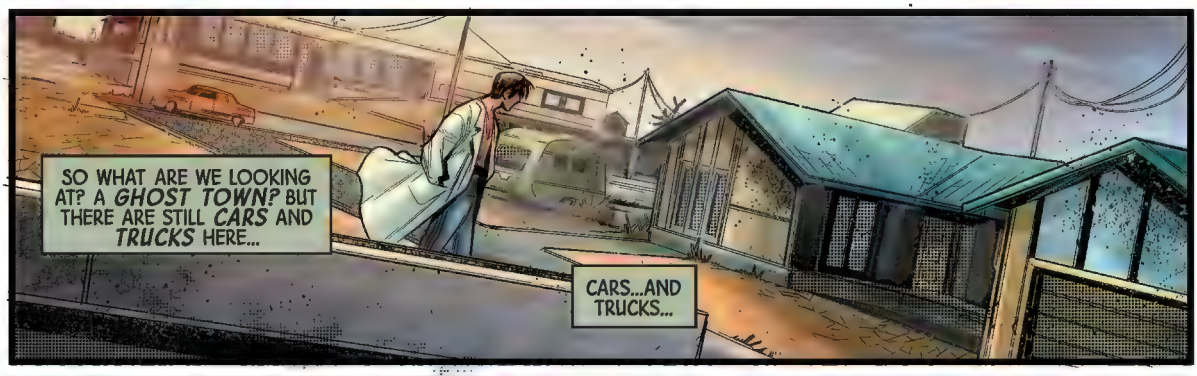
THE TIMING ISN'T GREAT.
NIGHT IS THE HULK'S TIME--BUT RIGHT NOW, IT'S JUST PAST NOON. HE WON'T BE APPEARING IN PERSON.
AND MAYBE THAT'S FOR THE BEST. SOMETHING'S GOTTEN INTO HIM. INTO US.
I DON'T KNOW THE FULL STORY--WE DON'T TALK TO EACH OTHER THE WAY WE USED TO--BUT UNTIL WE CURE OUR... INFECTION...
...WE JUST CAN'T TRUST OURSELVES.
SO I'M NOT LETTING YOU OUT, HULK.
FAIR?
HMM.
NO ANSWERING ITCH IN MY SKULL. NO STRANGE HUNCHES OR COMPULSIONS...
WELCOME TO HAPPY TRAILS, NM
HE AGREES WITH ME.
ISN'T THAT TERRIFYING.

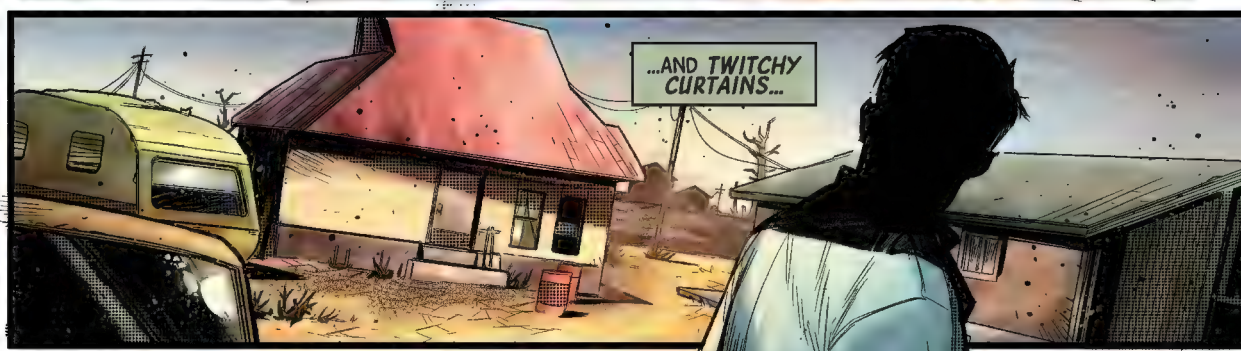
MARSHAL'S OFFICE
ALL RIGHT. WE'RE NOT IN A POSITION TO DEAL WITH THIS ONE. I ACCEPT THAT.
THE LOCAL POLICE, THEN. I'LL POINT THEM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, THEN SLIP AWAY.
THEY'LL CALL STARK OR DANVERS. SOMEONE QUALIFIED TO DO THE RIGHT THING FOR STEPHEN.
THE HEROES CAN SOLVE THE MURDER AND SAVE THE DAY, AND IT'LL BE LIKE I WAS NEVER...
...NEVER HERE AT ALL.
HELLO?
LET'S NOT JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS, BRUCE.
HELLO?
ANYONE?
I'M SURE THERE'S A GOOD EXPLANATION FOR A TOTALLY EMPTY POLICE STATION IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY...

NOBODY ON THE STREET EITHER...
I THOUGHT THIS TOWN WAS QUIET. BUT IT'S DESERTED.

I'D GET SOME ANSWERS AT THE BAR--MY USUAL METHOD IN A STRANGE TOWN--


--BUT IT'S CLOSED RIGHT NOW.
AND FOREVER, BY THE LOOK OF IT.
RAWHIDE SALOON
CLOSED


SO WHAT ARE WE LOOKING AT? A GHOST TOWN? BUT THERE ARE STILL CARS AND TRUCKS HERE...
CARS...AND TRUCKS...

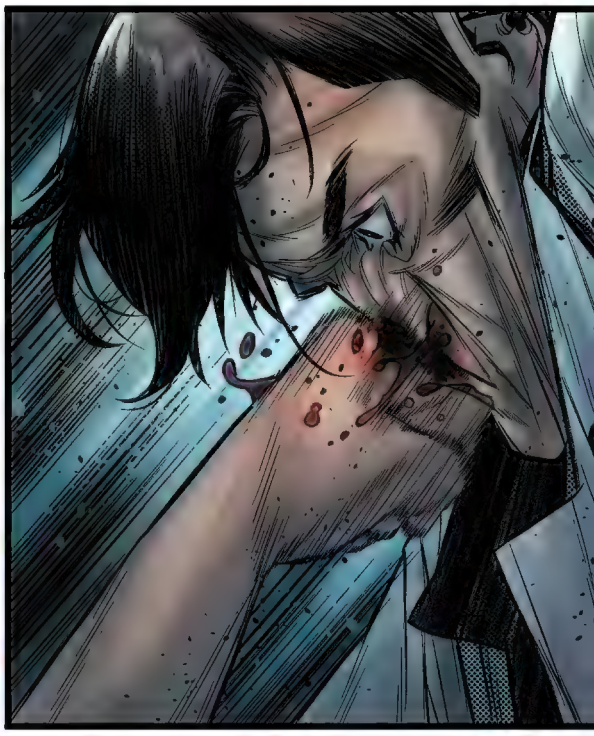

...AND TWITCHY CURTAINS...

...AND PEOPLE.
ALL RIGHT.
LET'S GET SOME ANSWERS.
EXCUSE ME?
HELLO?
CAN I COME IN, PLEASE? I WON'T TAKE UP MUCH OF YOUR TIME--
--BUT I HAVE A FEW--
--QUESTIONS.
PAUSE.

INTERLUDE.
‹WHAT WAS THAT NOISE...?›*
*TRANSLATED FROM A MINOR RIMWORLD DIALECT.
‹HELLO? IS SOMEONE THERE?›
‹THIS IS A RESTRICTED AREA, YOU KNOW! THESE WORKINGS ARE ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAINING THE DIRECTION OF THE--›
BOO!
HEE HEE HEE
INTERLUDE COMPLETE.

RESUME.
WE DON'T WANT TROUBLE.
HE--HE DOESN'T KNOW I'M HERE.
AND YOU DON'T WANT TO BE HERE EITHER.
YOU DON'T. JUST--JUST TURN AROUND, MISTER.
JUST GO.
GET OUT OF MY WAY, INSECT!
5
GET OUT
OF
MY

WAY--
HNHH--
NO! STAY BACK!! DON'T-- DON'T!!
YOU WILL SHOOT ME NO MORE!

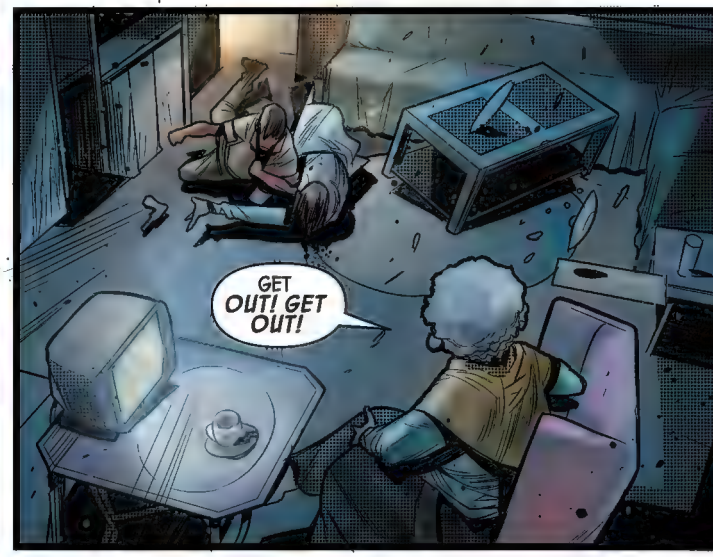


YOU DARE ATTACK THE HULK???!

AAH--

AAAHH--

GET--GET
OUT--


GET
OUT! GET
OUT!

WHY
ARE YOU
HERE?
WHY?

WHY
ARE YOU
HERE?

HATE YOU?? WHY SHOULDN'T
I HATE YOU? WHY SHOULDN'T
I HATE ALL MANKIND??

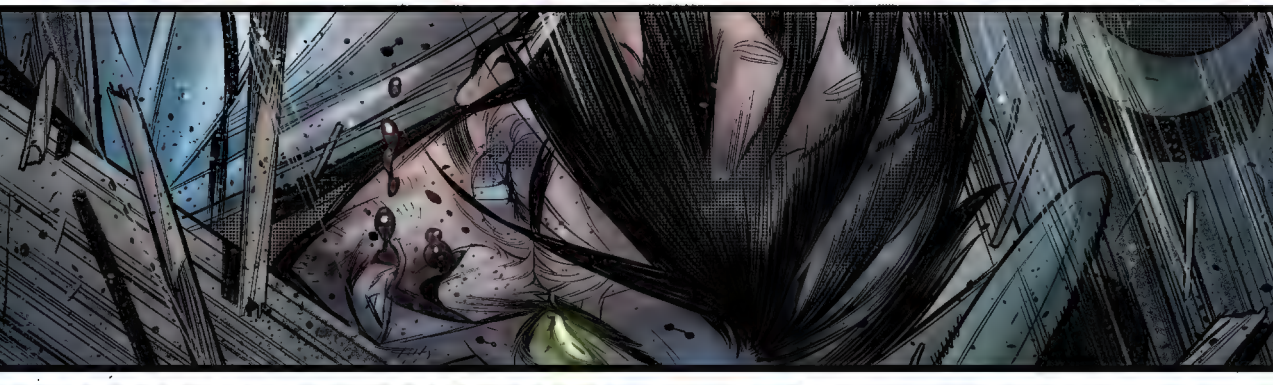
HRRHH--

--AAHH!

MY EYE--

ARGHHH!

LITTLE PSYCHO--

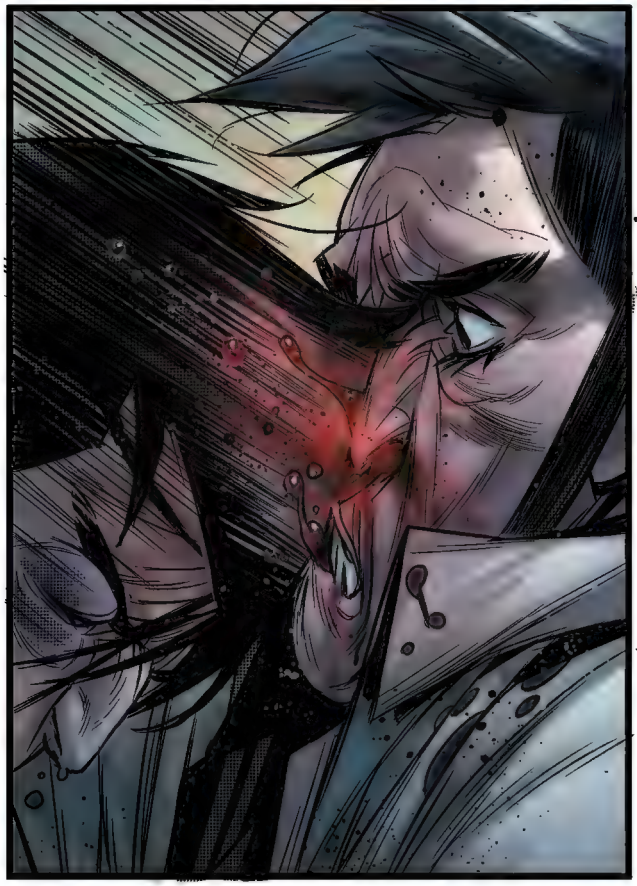


YEAH? YOU LIKE THAT?
YOU LIKE THAT?

BIH
BIH MUH

TUNG

NOW-- REVENGE!!!
NO! NO!
8

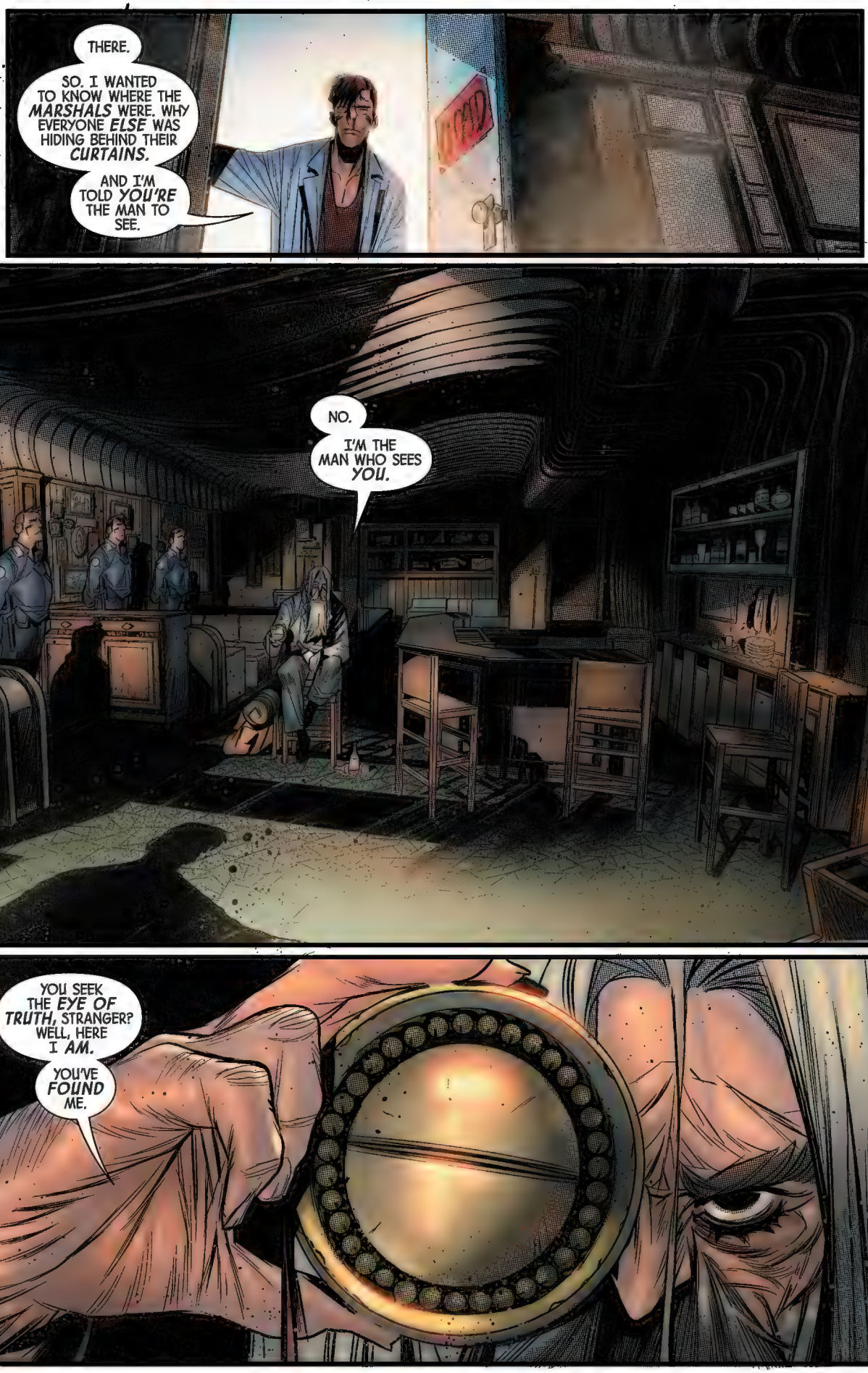


STOP IT!
STOP IT!

HFFF.
HHH.
HHUH.
NUH.
SO! THIS IS WHAT THE PUNY HUMANS FEAR!
NUH.
NOBODY AROUND. WANT TO KNOW WHY.
TALK NOW.

HORP
OKAY.
OKAY.
OKAY.
RAWHIDE SALOON
MY USUAL METHOD.

KNOCK, KNOCK.
WHO'S--
THERE--
CLOSED
HNNGH--
OUT!!
OPEN-- YOU--
RRRH--


THERE.
SO. I WANTED TO KNOW WHERE THE MARSHALS WERE. WHY EVERYONE ELSE WAS HIDING BEHIND THEIR CURTAINS.
AND I'M TOLD YOU'RE THE MAN TO SEE.
NO.
I'M THE MAN WHO SEES YOU.
YOU SEEK THE EYE OF TRUTH, STRANGER? WELL, HERE I AM.
YOU'VE FOUND ME.

HMH.
OVER THERE. THAT'S NOT A MAGIC SPELL, IS IT?
YOU JUST TOLD THEM NOT TO MOVE. AND THEY DIDN'T.
FOR...HOW LONG? HOURS? A DAY? MUSCLES CRAMPING, HOLDING IN THEIR BLADDERS... OR NOT. I CAN SMELL URINE.
BUT THEY DON'T MOVE.
BECAUSE THE ALTERNATIVE... WOULD BE WORSE.
HEH.
YOU KNOW... I UNDERSTAND SOMETHING ABOUT REVENGE, MISTER EYE.
TELL ME WHAT THEY DID.

"THEY SAID I DESERVED IT.
"VAGRANCY. DISTURBING THE PEACE.
"SIMPLY EXISTING."
I WAS SOMETHING THEY DIDN'T WANT TO SEE, YOU SEE.
AN UNPLEASANT TRUTH.
"SO THEY BEAT ME BLOODY AND DUMPED ME AT THE EDGE OF TOWN. CAST ME OUT INTO THE NIGHT.
"IT WAS COLD. I WAS ALONE. BLEEDING...FREEZING...
"BUT THERE WAS A BARN...
"...AND IN THE BARN WAS A MAGIC FIRE, CAST BY A MAGIC MAN..."

SO HE WAS ALREADY BURNING? HE WAS DEAD WHEN YOU FOUND HIM?
THAT DETAIL'S IMPORTANT.
OH, YES. HE WAS DEAD...
"...AND HIS EYE WAS OPEN.
"WHEN IT LOOKED INTO ME, IT SHOWED ME THE SECRET TRUTH... THE TRUTH OF MYSELF...
"...AND THAT SET ME FREE.
WELL, LOOK WHO'S BACK TO STINK UP THE PLACE. YOU GOT A DEATH WISH, OLD MAN?
NOW WE'VE GOT TO--
"FREE TO SHOW OTHERS THEIR TRUTH."
LOOK INTO MY EYE.
LOOK AT YOURSELVES.
N-NO! STOP IT!
MAKE IT STOP!

THE TRUTH OF WHO THEY TRULY *ARE*. THEIR OWN *SOULS*, IN DETAIL RESERVED FOR THE EYE OF GOD *HIMSELF*.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE YOURSELF *AGAIN*, MARSHAL? IN ALL YOUR *MAJESTY* AND *GLORY*?
NO.
NO, SIR.
PLEASE.
...
ALL RIGHT.
I *DO* UNDERSTAND REVENGE, BUT...YOU'VE *HAD* YOURS. AND I DON'T THINK MY *FRIEND* WOULD LIKE THE WAY YOU'RE USING HIS *TOOLS*.
GIVE.
BUT YOUR *FRIEND* ISN'T *HERE*.
*FAIR WARNING*, STRANGER. YOU DON'T WANT MY EYE LOOKING AT *YOU*--
WELL...WHY *NOT*?
LET'S TRY IT.

WHAT...?
COME ON. THAT'S A MAGIC THING, AFTER ALL. IT BREAKS THE RULES.
LET'S SEE IF IT BRINGS OUT MY HIDDEN TRUTH.
NO.
I'VE CHANGED MY MIND.
OH?
HAVE YOU?
GIVE IT HERE--
GET BACK! LET GO!
MARSHAL! GET HIM OFF ME!
I--I--
DO IT!
DO AS YOU'RE TOLD!

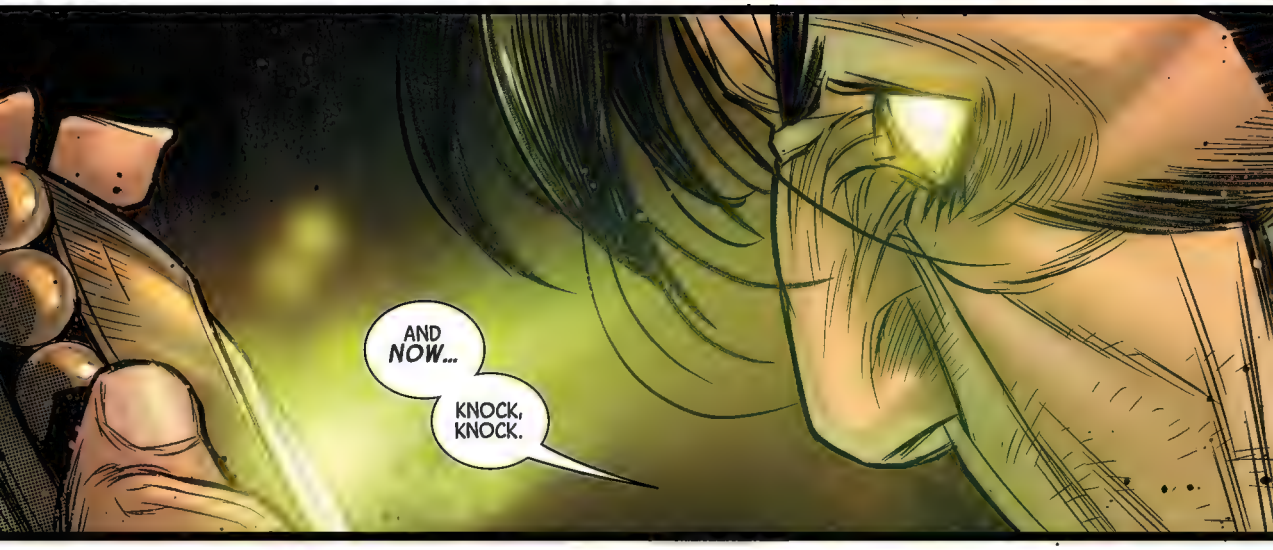
IS--IS THAT--
AGAIN! IN THE HEAD!
DO IT!
YOU WANT ME TO KILL HIM?
NOW YOU TASTE THE STING OF YOUR WEAPON.!
I--I CAN'T JUST--
LOOK OUT--
AAAHH!

AH-AH-AH.
BACK AWAY.

REMEMBER. THIS...THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT.
DON'T MAKE ME ANGRY.

G-GET HIM! STOP HIM!
HERE'S AN AGE-OLD TRUTH, MISTER EYE...

...QUIT WHILE YOU'RE AHEAD.
AAHH--


AND NOW...
KNOCK, KNOCK.

HNH.

WHO'S THERE?

...
YOU KNOW I'M A LOT BETTER THAN BANNER IN A FIGHT, RIGHT?
JUST THE TWO OF US, THEN.
WE CAN MAKE IT IF WE TRY.
DON'T-- PLEASE-- DON'T HURT ME--
I JUST WANTED TO-- TO MAKE THEM PAY--
NEVER STOP MAKING THEM PAY. LIKE BANNER SAID--WE'RE REAL UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THAT.
FOR INSTANCE, IF SOMEONE HURTS HIM...I TAKE IT PERSONAL.
YOU GOT HIM SHOT, BEATEN AND HIT WITH A NIGHTSTICK. THAT HURT A LOT.
AND NOW I'M OUT IN THE DAY. THAT'S NO PICNIC EITHER.
SO.
WHAT'S THE WORST THING I CAN DO TO YOU?

NO! STOP! STOP IT!
STOP LOOKING AT ME!
LIKE I THOUGHT.
EVEN INSIDE BANNER, I KNEW YOU WERE LYING ABOUT THAT PART. THE TRUTH DIDN'T SET YOU FREE--IT JUST TORTURED YOU.
NICE WEAPON TO THREATEN THE OTHER PUNY HUMANS WITH, THOUGH.
NOBODY LIKES THE FACE UNDERNEATH...
JUST-- JUST LET ME GO. PLEASE.
I DIDN'T KILL YOUR FRIEND-- I WASN'T LYING ABOUT THAT--
THAT'S WHY YOU'RE BREATHING. I SOLVED THAT MURDER MYSTERY BEFORE BANNER EVEN SAW THE BODY.
WHO KILLED STEPHEN STRANGE?
YOU DID.
WHO...?
AM I RIGHT?

WELL, HULK...
...THEREBY HANGS A *TALE.*

#1 VARIANT BY KAARE ANDREWS

DEFENDERS:
BEST DEFENSE

THIS IS THE TRAIN.
YOU'VE SEEN IT ON THE EDGE OF SLEEPLESS NIGHTS. YOU KNOW IT WELL.
THE GREAT ENGINE OF PLANETS. A JUGGERNAUT OF LIVING WORLDS, HURTLING HEADLONG THROUGH SPACE.
IT PULLS IN NEW WORLDS ALONG THE WAY, TAKES EVERYTHING OF THEM THAT'S THEIR OWN AND--WHEN IT'S DRAINED THEM DRY-- IT MAKES FUEL OF THEM IN ITS FURNACE.
IF THEY RESIST, KEEP WHAT'S THEIRS, WHAT'S IMPORTANT--THEY END UP AS FUEL ANYWAY. IN THE END, EVERYTHING WILL BE FUEL FOR THE TRAIN.
IT'D MAKE AN EXCELLENT METAPHOR IF IT WEREN'T REAL.
THE THRONE, THE POWER, THE DAMNED AND THE DEVIL

THIS IS THE CONDUCTOR. THE ONE WHO DRIVES THE TRAIN.
IT DIRECTS THE PLANETS INTO THE FURNACE, AS IT HAS SINCE BEFORE THE FIRST MEMORY. ITS LABOR IS ENDLESS.
MAYBE THAT'S A METAPHOR AS WELL. WHO CAN SAY? I STUDIED MEDICINE, NOT POETRY--THOUGH I'VE FOUND SOME POETRY IN EXISTENCE SINCE.
THE CONDUCTOR WORKS ON, THOUGH ITS WILL IS NO LONGER ITS OWN.
THERE IS SOMETHING COILED AROUND ITS MIND.

THIS IS A *DEAD THING.*
UNTIL RECENTLY, IT WAS MOVING FROM WORLD TO WORLD IN A MORE *HUMANOID* FORM, MURDERING THE CONDUCTOR'S *FAMILIARS*--ITS MORTAL SERVANTS AND FACILITATORS.
THAT WAS TO GET A CLEAR RUN AT THE CONDUCTOR *ITSELF.* NOW THIS DEAD THING--THIS ALIEN *GHOST*--COMMANDS THE TRAIN AND SETS IT ON ITS COURSE.
I *KNEW* IT, WHEN IT WAS ALIVE.
IT HAD A *NAME.*
NEBULON...

...DO YOU REMEMBER ME?
THIS ONE WIELDS A POWER INCONCEIVABLE TO MAN. HE HAD A NAME ONCE, TOO--NORRIN RADD.
NOW...HE IS THE SILVER SURFER.
...
YES, NORRIN RADD.
I DO.
GOOD. BECAUSE I REMEMBER YOU, NEBULON.
AN ALIEN PROSPECTOR, TURNED CULT LEADER, TURNED TRAITOR TO HIS SPECIES...
...TURNED GHOST? DEATH DIDN'T SUIT YOU?
WELL... I NEVER WANTED TO BE DEAD, SURFER. FRANKLY, I ONLY DIED OUT OF PEER PRESSURE.
AND THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AFTERWORLDS...IF YOU MEET THE RIGHT PEOPLE.
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING THE TRAIN, NEBULON?
THE SOL SYSTEM.
THE GRAVITATIONAL FORCES ALONE WILL REDUCE EARTH TO DUST.
OVER SEVEN BILLION SOULS--SNUFFED OUT IN AN INSTANT. BECAUSE I WILLED IT...
I THINK NOT.
MY MASTER HAS HIS OWN PLANS FOR THE TRAIN-- AS DO I. YOU HAVE NO PLACE IN THEM.
AND AGAINST THE POWER COSMIC, DIMINISHED THOUGH IT IS HERE, YOU HAVE NO--
ACCKK!
NO HOPE? NO--NOT WITHOUT POWERFUL MYSTIC FORCES ON MY SIDE.
GUESS WHAT, NORRIN RADD?
IT'S TRUE. IN DEATH, NEBULON HAS ACQUIRED POWERS FAR GREATER THAN HE HAD IN LIFE.
THE TRAIN ROLLS ON...AND HOPE IS LOST.
FORTUNATELY... I HAVE A PLAN.

MY NAME IS STEPHEN STRANGE--BUT NOT THIS WORLD'S STRANGE. NOT ANYMORE.
NOW I'M HERE--TO CREATE A TIMELINE WHERE MY FUTURE DOESN'T HAPPEN.
UH-HUH. SO BLOW UP THE TRAIN.
PROBLEM SOLVED.
I AM A DEAD MAN FROM A DOOMED FUTURE--ONE WHERE NEBULON SUCCEEDED.
THIS IS THE HULK. A DARK HULK, INFECTED BY SOMETHING DARKER YET. I CAME TO KNOW HIM WELL IN MY OWN TIME.
FOR WHAT I HAVE PLANNED, HE'S EXACTLY WHAT I NEED.
"WHERE I'M FROM, HULK, THEY DID JUST THAT.
"THE TERRIBLE DECISION WAS MADE, AND WORLDS WERE BURNED IN FIRE...THEIR ENERGY CONSUMED...
"...BUT NOT ALL OF IT. NOT SO MANY PLANETS AT ONCE.
"THE TRAIN WAS STOPPED. THE RADIATION FROM THE EXPLOSION WASN'T. IT SPREAD LIKE A WAVE, KILLING DOZENS OF LIVING WORLDS IN ITS PATH..."

...INCLUDING EARTH.
AND THAT WAS ONLY THE START. TRUST ME WHEN I SAY THINGS GOT A LOT WORSE.
HNH. I'LL STILL SURVIVE...
TRUE. BUT YOU WON'T ENJOY IT MUCH.
I'LL MAKE THIS SIMPLE, HULK. I DESTROYED WHAT WAS LEFT OF MY EARTH TO RETURN HERE--BUT THE SPELL COST MY LIFE, TOO.
MY ASTRAL FORM HAS LESS THAN AN HOUR BEFORE IT DISSIPATES--AND I DIE THE TRUE DEATH. AND MY MAGIC IS DISSIPATING, TOO.
I CAN'T WASTE WHAT I HAVE LEFT ON COMBAT. I NEED SOMEONE TO HELP ME...
...SMASH, AS IT WERE.
EVERYBODY NEEDS SOMETHING.
ME AND BANNER HAVE OUR OWN PROBLEMS RIGHT NOW--
I KNOW. SOMETHING'S INFECTED YOU--AN ENTITY FROM FAR BELOW OUR REALITY.
I MAY KNOW SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP WITH THAT--LATER.
WHERE WE'RE GOING NOW...DARKNESS IS A WEAPON.
I HAVE ENOUGH ENERGY FOR TRANSPORTATION TO WHERE WE NEED TO GO.
BUT SHAPING THE NECESSARY PORTAL TAKES TIME...

...AND IN *HELL*, TIME IS ALWAYS RUNNING *OUT*.

NO MATTER *WHICH* HELL. *EVERY* SENTIENT SPECIES HAS AN AFTERLIFE--SOME HAVE *MANY*. HELLS ARE *COMMON*.

BUT THEY ARE ALL *LINKED*...

...AND THEY ALL *TRADE*.

OUR INVESTMENT PERFORMS *ADMIRABLY*, BORSS. HE USES THE POWER WE GAVE HIM *WELL*...

LET'S *HOPE*, MOG'RYS. IF EARTH *ISN'T* DESTROYED, IT'LL END *BADLY* FOR US.

WE BORROWED *TWO BILLION HUMAN SOULS* FROM MEPHISTO AND SOLD THEM TO THE SPIRIT-FLAYERS OF *CARCOSA*--SO WE'RE *RICH* NOW--

*VERY* RICH.

--BUT *EVENTUALLY*, MEPHISTO WILL WANT THOSE SOULS *BACK*.

IF EARTH *DIES*--SEVEN *BILLION* OF THAT SOUL TYPE HITTING THE MARKETS AT *ONCE*--HUMAN SOUL PRICES *CRASH*.

WE CAN BUY *FRESH* HUMAN SOULS *CHEAP*, PAY MEPHISTO BACK WITH *THOSE*... AND *PROFIT*.

YES, YES. I KNOW HOW TO SHORT A *SOUL*, BROTHER.

BUT IF EARTH *DOESN'T* DIE? W-WE'LL...OWE OUR *OWN* SOULS...

...A *BILLION TIMES OVER*...

YOU'RE *WORRYING* TOO MUCH, BORSS. NEBULON *WILL* DELIVER.

HE'S MANIPULATED LESSER BEINGS FOR HIS OWN SELFISH REASONS *THROUGHOUT* HIS LIFE. HE SHARES OUR *POLITICS*.

HE'S ONE OF *US*.

SO *HE* WILL SIT AT OUR *RIGHT PAW*--AS OUR FELLOW *DEMONS* SQUABBLE AND DEBASE THEMSELVES FOR A *TASTE* OF OUR NEWFOUND WEALTH.

AND THEN... WILL WE EAT THEIR *FACES*, BROTHER?

OH YES.

WE'LL EAT *ALL* THE FACES.

MORE SPEED, CONDUCTOR!
ANOTHER WORLD INTO THE COSMIC FIRE!
N-NO--NO MORE--
NO MORE DEATH--
AREN'T YOU DEAD YET, NORRIN RADD?
WELL, NOT LONG NOW. I'M LEECHING YOUR COSMIC POWER, AND THE TRAIN IS PICKING UP SPEED.
YOU AND THAT MUDBALL THAT KILLED ME WILL SOON BE VERY DEAD.
NOBODY'S COMING TO SAVE YOU...
AN ENTRANCE LINE IF EVER I HEARD ONE.
BUT NOT MINE.

IMPERIUS REX!
THIS IS NAMOR THE SUB-MARINER. ANOTHER OLD ACQUAINTANCE. HE'S NOT NORMALLY QUITE SO SHINY--
--BUT TOOMIE--THE SURFER'S BOARD--CHOSE TO SAVE HIM FROM DEATH IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE.
THE BOARD DISRUPTED HIS ECTOPLASMIC ESSENCE.
TOOMIE! NAMOR! KEEP AT HIM!
AND NOW...ALL IS GOING AS I REMEMBER IT DID.
GIVEN HOW THIS ENDS...THAT'S NOT A GOOD THING.
AAARRGHH!

SO...
NO!
I-IF THESE ACTIVISTS DEFEAT NEBULON--
EVEN IF THEY DO--IT'S TOO LATE.
THE CONDUCTOR'S FAMILIARS ARE DEAD. THEY CAN'T CHANGE THE TRAIN'S COURSE--THEY CAN ONLY DESTROY IT. WHICH KILLS THE EARTH ANYWAY.
RELAX, MY BROTHER. THERE'S NOTHING THAT CAN GO...
...WRONG...
UH-OH.
YOU JINXED IT.
...LET'S ALTER THE NARRATIVE.

HOW DARE YOU, SIR! THIS IS A PLACE OF BUSINESS!
RROOWRR!
YEAH. THAT WAS A MISTAKE.
SEE...MY BUSINESS IS HURTING PEOPLE.
AND IT'S HUNGRY WORK.
AAAHH!
NO! STOP!
STOP!
AAEEIIIGH!
I--I NEVER THOUGHT ANYONE WOULD EAT OUR FACES...

MM-MMM. TASTES LIKE CHICKEN.
WHO'S NEXT?
M-MUH-- MUH--
MUMSY!
WHAT THE HELL...?
THEY'RE ONLY MINOR DEMONS-- THEIR PHYSICAL BODIES ARE NO MATCH FOR YOU IN YOUR CURRENT FORM. BUT PHYSICAL BODIES ARE A LUXURY THEY CAN GIVE UP.
AFTER ALL, THEY CAN ALWAYS BUY NEW ONES...
...AND THEIR ESSENCE CAN BE PUT TO BETTER USE ELSEWHERE.

"THE REAL FIGHT IS JUST BEGINNING," I TELL HIM.
I FEEL... POWER...
SO MUCH POWER!
BY SEDNA'S EYES--
IT IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT.
IN AN INSTANT, NAMOR IS FLUNG BACK TO THE DEPTHS OF SPACE--THIS TIME WITHOUT THE PROTECTION OF THE SURFER'S BOARD.
NAMOR!
JOIN WITH HIS BOARD AGAIN-- KEEP NEBULON OCCUPIED, IF NOT DEFEATED--OR USE IT TO RESCUE HIS FRIEND, THUS CONDEMNING MORE WORLDS TO THE TRAIN'S FURNACE.
AND NOW, NORRIN HAS A CHOICE TO MAKE.
AND EITHER WAY, EARTH IS LOST. AN IMPOSSIBLE DECISION...

...EVEN IF WE LET HIM MAKE IT.
C'MERE, SHINY. YOU'RE GOING AFTER HIM.
HULK? IS THAT YOU?
WAIT-- I'LL NEED MY--
--BOOOAAARDD!
DON'T WORRY, RADD--
--I'LL TAKE REAL GOOD CARE OF IT.
AARRGH!
AS TOOMIE'S PSYCHIC SCREAM FILLS MY THIRD EAR, I FEEL MY CONSCIENCE STING--LIKE A PHANTOM PAIN FROM AN ORGAN LONG DEAD.

I WONDER IF NORRIN HEARS IT TOO.
NAMOR!
HULK'S AIM WAS TRUE-- BUT WITHOUT MY BOARD, I CANNOT--
AFTER ALL...
AH. OF COURSE.
SUCH AN ELEGANT SOLUTION...
...THE SURFER...
...AND THE BOARD...
...ARE ONE.
...
THIS IS RIDICULOUS.
YOU THINK SO?
I CONSIDER IT SUBLIME.

STOP IT! STOP HITTING ME!
VIOLENCE ISN'T THE ANSWER!
THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAY--
THE HULK IS AN EXCELLENT DISTRACTION. HE'S BOUGHT VALUABLE MOMENTS...
...MOMENTS THE WATER PLANET OF VODAN--RECENTLY VISITED BY NAMOR--WOULD NOT OTHERWISE HAVE.
FOR IT HAS REACHED THE HEAD OF THE QUEUE...
...FOR THE FURNACE.
THE WATER IS WARMING. I--I CAN SEE FLAMES--
WE'LL BE BOILED ALIVE!
PRINCESS--SORRY, QUEEN KATAW--WHAT DO WE DO?
WE MAKE PEACE WITH OUR ANCESTORS.
I WILL SEE YOU SOON, FATHER.
BUT I HAVE PLANNED THIS FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. I FORESAW EVERY MOMENT--EACH EVENT IN THE CHAIN.
NEBULON CONCENTRATES ON THE HULK...AND GIVES ME MY MOMENT...

...TO SLIDE MY ASTRAL FORM INTO THE MACRO-MIND OF THE CONDUCTOR.
I DO NOT HAVE NEBULON'S LEVEL OF POWER. I CANNOT CONTROL HIM.
BUT IF I EXERT ALL MY WILL-- ALL MY DWINDLING STRENGTH--
--I CAN, PERHAPS-- INDUCE--
--A SPASM.
THE CONDUCTOR'S WAND JERKS.
AND A PLANET OF SOULS IN MY CARE IS HURLED FROM THE FIRE INTO THE DEPTHS...TO FACE A FREEZING DOOM, FAR FROM ANY SUN...

...FAR FROM ANYONE WHO MIGHT HELP THEM.
THAT PLANET-- THAT IS VODAN, SURFER. A WORLD PEOPLED BY ATLANTEANS.
MY PEOPLE, WHETHER THEY LIKE IT OR NOT. AND I WON'T LET THEM DIE...
NO. NOR I.
PERHAPS... USING THE POWER COSMIC...
...THERE ARE ORPHAN SUNS, WITHOUT WORLDS. IF I COULD CREATE A WORMHOLE TO ONE SUCH STAR...
...THERE IS A CHANCE. BUT THE ENERGIES IT WOULD TAKE...
I AM SEPARATED FROM MY BOARD. DRAINED FROM THE BATTLE WITH NEBULON. I AM... TOO WEAK.
GALACTUS IS THE SOURCE OF THE POWER COSMIC--BUT HE IS FAR FROM HERE, AT THE BACK OF THE TRAIN. I DOUBT HE WOULD EVEN HEAR US--
WE MAY NOT NEED HIM TO.
IF GALACTUS IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR POWER...IF HE GENERATES IT FROM THE ENERGY HE TAKES IN...
SURFER-- CAN YOU FOCUS THOSE PLANET-FINDING SENSES OF YOURS ON A SINGLE PERSON?
OF SORTS.
IT IS EASIER IF I KNOW THEM, BUT... YES. YOU HAVE A PLAN?

"I'M GOING TO CUT OUT THE MIDDLEMAN."
IT-- IT GROWS COLDER, MY LADY, AND OUR TECHNOLOGIES FAIL US--WE WILL ALL FREEZE IN THE VOID OF SPACE--
THEN FREEZE WITH DIGNITY, CURSE YOU!
ALL OF YOU! WE WILL FIGHT THIS FATE TO THE LAST, I SWEAR! USING ALL OUR POWER--BUT NONE OF OUR FEAR!
IF THIS WHOLE WORLD TURNS TO ICE--LET THE ICE PRESERVE NOT PANIC, BUT PRIDE AND NOBILITY!
LET US GO TO OUR GRAVES AS VODANI--
--AS THE TRUE ATLANTEANS!
TRUE ATLANTEANS?
WE ARE ALL THE TRUE ATLANTEANS, QUEEN KATAW.
YOU!
A LESSON YOUR FATHER SHOULD HAVE LEARNED SOONER.
YOU DARE TO SPEAK OF HIM? YOU CHOKED HIM TO DEATH IN FRONT OF ME!
TO EVEN RETURN HERE-- YOU ARE REGICIDE, NAMOR! SLAYER OF KINGS!
YOU KILLED HER FATHER?
THREATS TO MY PERSON ARE ONE THING.
THREATS TO MY PEOPLE...ARE ANOTHER.
SO I ASK NO FORGIVENESS, FOR IT WOULD CHEAPEN US BOTH. KILL ME IF YOU WISH.
BUT I OFFER RESPECT BETWEEN MONARCHS...AND A WAY TO SAVE YOUR WORLD.

KATAW, YOU HAVE THE POWER TO ABSORB AND REDIRECT ELECTRICITY. WHICH, I ASSUME, INCLUDES BIO-ELECTRICITY.
THE ENERGY OF LIFE.
DO YOU RECOGNIZE MY COLLEAGUE?
THE SILVER MAN.
THE HERALD.
I SEE YOU DO.
HIS IS THE POWER COSMIC. HE CAN USE IT TO SAVE THIS WORLD...BUT HIS FLAME BURNS LOW.
NAMOR...?
HE NEEDS NOURISHMENT-- A MEAL FIT FOR HIS MASTER. AND IF WE HAVE LEARNED ANYTHING FROM GALACTUS...
...IT IS THAT LIFE FORCE RECHARGES HIS POWER.
NO...
SO-- TAKE SOME OF MINE.
I OFFER IT GLADLY...AS THE KING...
...FOR MY PEOPLE.

I CANNOT ACCEPT YOUR DEATH, NAMOR. ANY DEATH.
BUT IF... IF YOU ARE WILLING TO SACRIFICE...SOME LIFE FORCE FOR YOUR PEOPLE...
YOU AS WELL?
HIS PEOPLE. AGAIN AND AGAIN, HIS PEOPLE. A CULTURE HE HAS NEVER KNOWN, COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND--
--BUT IN HE PADDLES, AND SUDDENLY WE'RE HIS PEOPLE. AND WHAT DOES HE OFFER HIS PEOPLE?
PETULANCE, ARROGANCE, VIOLENCE...EMPTY, POSTURING OBEISANCE...
...INSIGNIFICANCE.
AND YOU.
WHO ARE YOU TO BE THE JUDGE OF WORLDS? PROTECTED FROM LIFE IN YOUR SILVER SHELL?
YOU WILL NOT ACCEPT DEATH?
YOU THINK YOU GET TO CHOOSE?
LOOK WELL, NAMOR. THIS IS WHY YOU WILL NEVER RULE US.
WHEN WE GO TO MEET OUR DEATHS--VODANI DO NOT KNEEL!
NO!

NO! PLEASE, NO!
NOT THIS--
NOT THIS!
HIS SCREAM TEARS A HOLE IN THE SKIN OF SPACE.
A DOORWAY TO A LONELY SUN. TO WARMTH AND GRAVITY. TO LIFE.
POOR NORRIN RADD.
HE IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL BEINGS IN THE UNIVERSE...
EVEN IN THE DEPTH OF HIS HORROR, THE SURFER'S GRASP OF SPATIAL MECHANICS IS EXCELLENT.
ALL HAIL! NOW AND FOREVER--
--ALL HAIL QUEEN KATAW!
...BUT SOME THINGS CAN NEVER BE OVERCOME.

SOME PART OF BRUCE BANNER WILL ALWAYS BE A CREATURE OF RAGE.
NEBULON WILL ALWAYS BE A DIM-WITTED PUPPET FOR ANY HALF-BAKED SCHEME GOING-- INCLUDING HIS OWN.
A COSMIC CON ARTIST FOREVER DOOMED TO BELIEVE HIS OWN HYPE.
AND ME? STEPHEN STRANGE, WHO HAS CHANGED SO VERY MUCH? WHO LOST HIS FRIENDS, HIS HOME, HIS LIFE, EVEN HIS POSITION AS THE "TRUE" STEPHEN STRANGE?
I'M A MAGICIAN BECAUSE I CHANGED--BECAUSE I TURNED AWAY FROM THE MATERIAL WORLD. BUT STILL...
...PART OF ME WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER A LITTLE HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE.
SPECIFICALLY, NEWTON'S THIRD LAW.
IT'S OVER, NEBULON. YOU'VE LOST.
YOU JUST DON'T KNOW IT YET.
TOO LATE FOR BRAVADO, STRANGE.
WHILE YOUR PET MONSTER FAILED TO STOP ME, THE TRAIN HAS ROLLED ON--AND IN SECONDS, IT WILL REDUCE YOUR PATHETIC SOLAR SYSTEM TO...
TO...

TO A PICTURESQUE *VIEW.*

NOW COMING UP ON OUR *LEFT*... AS THE TRAIN *PASSES BY.*

NEWTON'S THIRD LAW. EVERY *ACTION* HAS A *REACTION.* FLINGING *VODAN* INTO THE VOID SHIFTED THE *TRAIN,* IN TURN.

A *FRACTION OF A DEGREE*-- BUT AT THE SPEEDS AND DISTANCES INVOLVED, MORE THAN *ENOUGH.*

DON'T BLAME YOURSELF FOR NOT *NOTICING.* YOU WERE DISTRACTED BY...MY *"PET MONSTER."*

HEY, *STEVE*--

--GUESS THAT DEAL HE DID *FELL THROUGH,* HUH? *WHO* WAS THAT WITH AGAIN?

*MEPHISTO?*

...NO.

OH *YES.*

STEPHEN. HULK.

ALWAYS A *PLEASURE...*

*NO! NO! NOOOO!*

BE ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS *QUICKLY,* DARK ONE.

WE HAVE BUSINESS OF OUR *OWN...*

STEVE?

MY POWER IS GONE. *I* AM ALMOST GONE. AND THE *HULK* MUST BE RETURNED *HOME*-- CURED OF HIS *SPIRITUAL INFECTION,* IF POSSIBLE--

OH, IT'S NOT.

THE DEVIL IN HIM IS *FAR* STRONGER THAN *I* AM. BUT I *CAN* RETURN HIM TO EARTH...

...FOR A *SMALL CONSIDERATION.*

"I'M SURPRISED THEY DIDN'T HOLD YOU TO *ACCOUNT,* NAMOR..."

FOR KILLING ONE MONARCH AND ASSISTING IN THE DEATH OF ANOTHER?
YOU SAID YOURSELF--YOU WON'T LET THEM KILL ME. WHICH LEAVES EXILE...
...AND DISGRACE.
AH-- TOOMIE HAS RETURNED.
AND EARTH IS OUT OF DANGER, IT SEEMS.
DOCTOR STRANGE AND THE HULK FINISHED WHAT WE BEGAN...
THOSE TWO. OF COURSE.
ANOTHER EXCITING NON-TEAM-UP FOR THE DEFENDERS. LET'S ALL HAVE SHAWARMA SOMETIME.
IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I HAVE A MYSTERIOUS MAGIC TUNNEL TO CATCH...
NAMOR.
WAIT.
DID YOU KNOW?
WHEN YOU BROUGHT ME HERE...DID YOU KNOW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN?
...
I WANTED TO MAKE THE SACRIFICE.
TO SAVE KATAW'S WORLD...
...AND UNDERMINE HER RULE. FROM THERE, I COULD HAVE FORCED AN ALLIANCE--USED THE VODANI TO FURTHER MY ENDS.
BUT SHE WAS RIGHT. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THEIR CULTURE.
I WAS ARROGANT, AS EVER. AND... AS EVER...

"...ANOTHER PAID THE COST FOR IT."
I HAVE RETURNED, O GALACTUS.
YOU HAVE. AND I SENSE DEATH ON YOU, HERALD.
A LIFE SPENT TO GIVE YOU THE ENERGY YOU NEEDED...
I...WAS GIVEN NO CHOICE. I PROTESTED, BUT NO ONE HEARD ME.
FOR ALL MY POWER, I WAS TREATED AS...ONLY POWER. AS THE DEUS EX MACHINA IN SOME GREAT DRAMA OF WORLDS.
WITHOUT MY BIDDING. WITHOUT MY CONSENT...
AH.
THEN YOU BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND.
COME, NORRIN. YOU AND I HAVE FAR TO GO TOGETHER YET.
AND THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE.
THE TRAIN ROLLS ON.

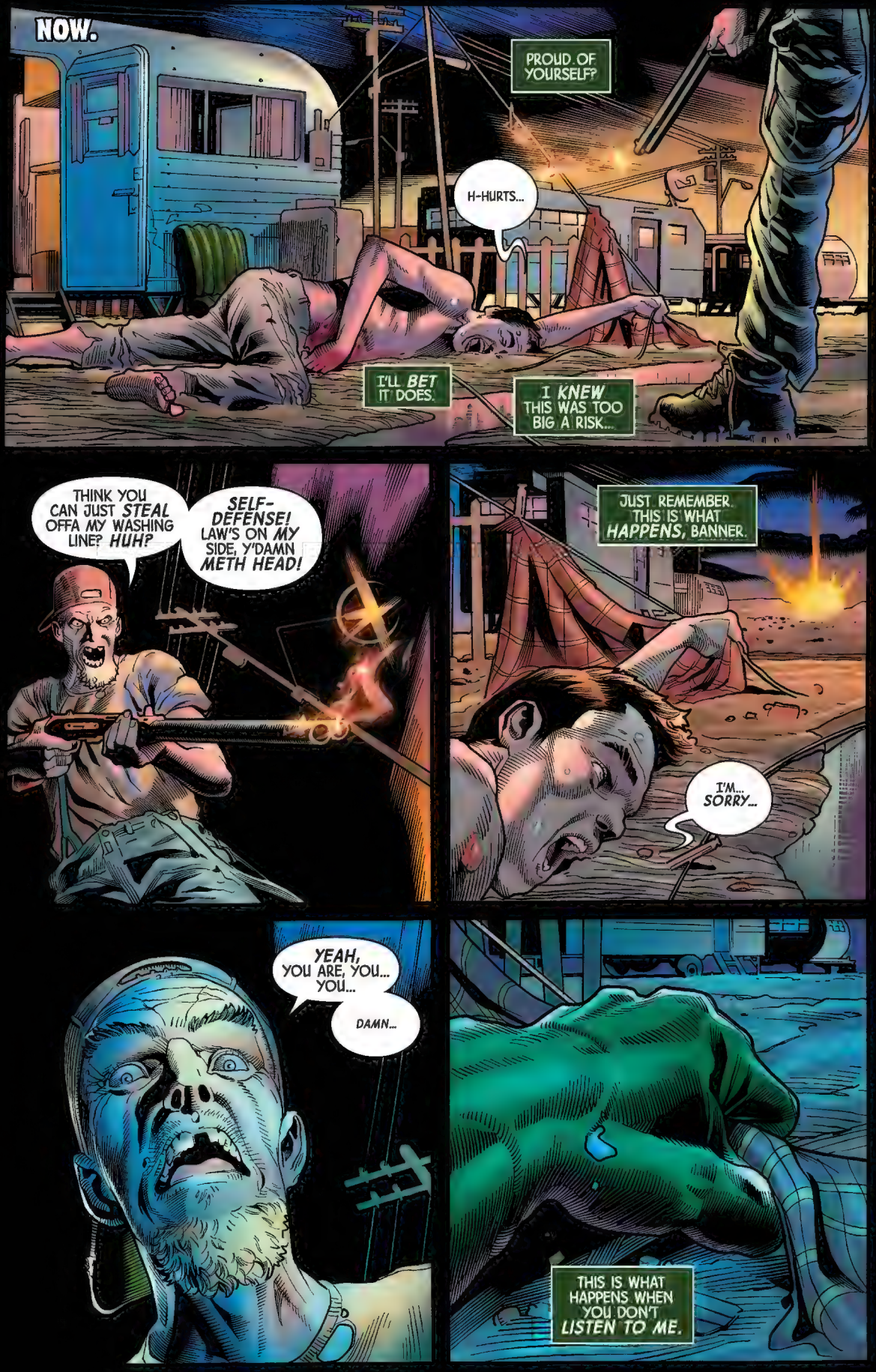
AND HOPE IS LOST.
THERE. THE HULK IS HOME AND DRY.
EVERYONE'S WHERE THEY BELONG...
...INCLUDING YOU.
I KNOW YOU THINK YOU'RE TRICKING ME SOMEHOW, DOCTOR.
YOU SEE MY DOMAIN AS SOME SAFE HARBOR FOR YOUR TIME-LOST SOUL. YOU THINK YOU MIGHT ESCAPE...AND LIVE AGAIN...
BUT YOU'VE TRICKED YOURSELF. THERE'S NO ESCAPE.
YOU ARE POWERLESS, DEAD AND DAMNED--NO LONGER EVEN THE TRUE STEPHEN STRANGE. NOBODY WILL BOTHER TO REMEMBER YOU.
NO TEAM IS COMING TO SAVE YOU...
FORTUNATELY...
...I HAVE A PLAN.

9

"WE ARE EACH OUR OWN DEVIL, AND WE MAKE THIS WORLD OUR HELL."

– OSCAR WILDE
"THE DUCHESS OF PADUA"

ONE MONTH AGO.
CARL "CRUSHER" CREEL. THE BIG, BAD ABSORBING MAN.
PROUD OF YOURSELF, CARL?

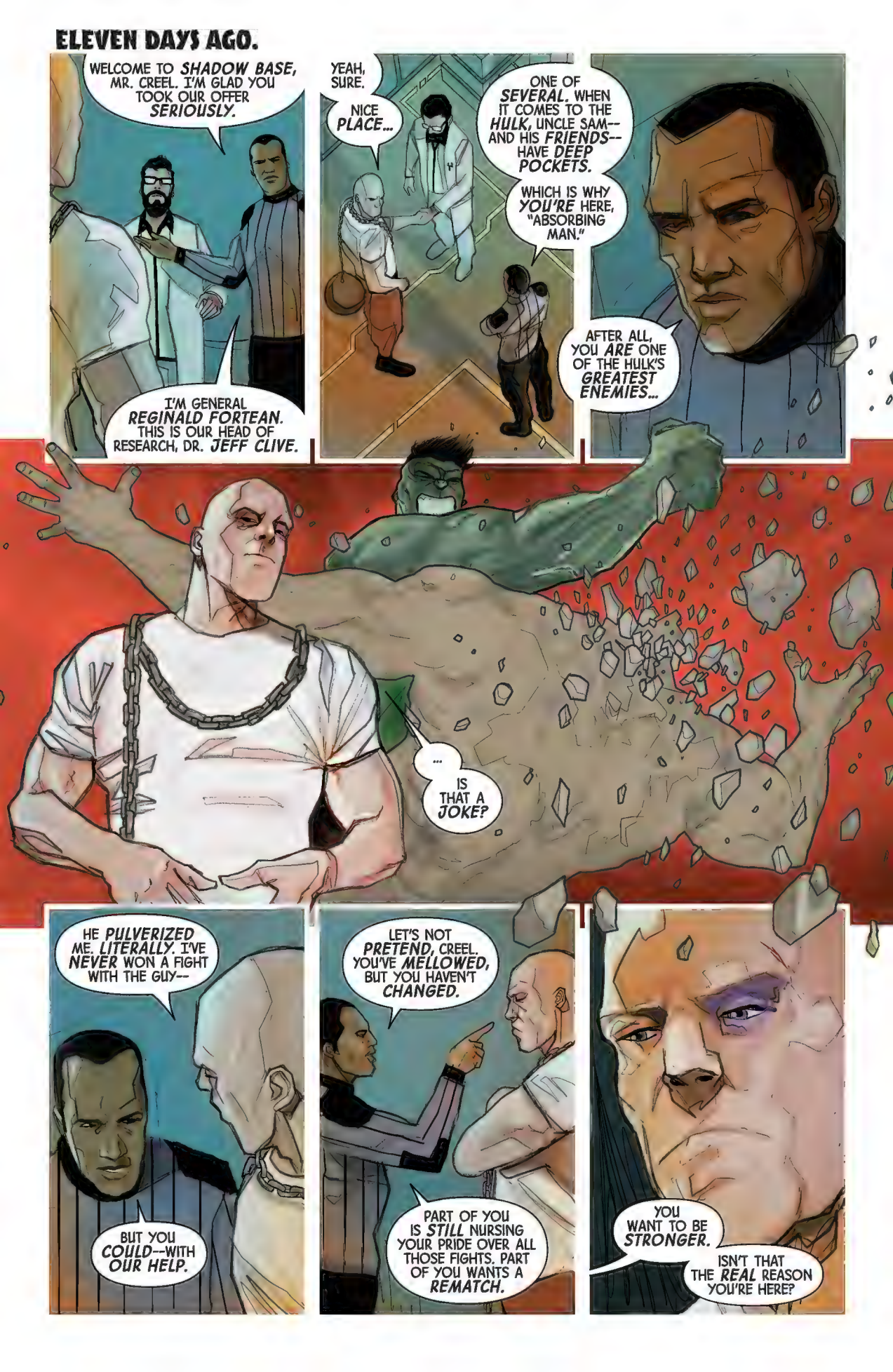

NOW.
PROUD OF YOURSELF?
H-HURTS...
I'LL BET IT DOES.
I KNEW THIS WAS TOO BIG A RISK...
THINK YOU CAN JUST STEAL OFFA MY WASHING LINE? HUH?
SELF-DEFENSE! LAW'S ON MY SIDE, Y'DAMN METH HEAD!
JUST REMEMBER. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS, BANNER.
I'M... SORRY...
YEAH, YOU ARE, YOU... YOU...
DAMN...
THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T LISTEN TO ME.

ONE MONTH AGO.
YOU LISTENING, CREEL?
ANSWER THE QUESTION.
WHOK
ANSWER THE QUESTION, CREEL.
THIS CAN ALL STOP.
WE KNOW YOU WERE WORKING WITH TITANIA. YOU TWO LOVEBIRDS-- YOU'RE THICK AS THIEVES, AIN'TCHA?
JUST TELL US WHAT HER PART WAS.
SHE'S SITTING IN ROOM TWO SAYING SHE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS, CREEL.
SELLING YOU OUT SO SHE CAN WALK.
SHE'S CALLING YOU AN IDIOT--
SHE'S RIGHT.
PROUD OF IT TOO--
YOU THINK THAT'S FUNNY?
YOU THINK SHE CARES ABOUT YOU? THINK ANYONE DOES?
NEW RULES, CREEL. WE CAN DO WHAT WE WANT IN HERE.
KRAK
SO ANSWER THE QUESTION!

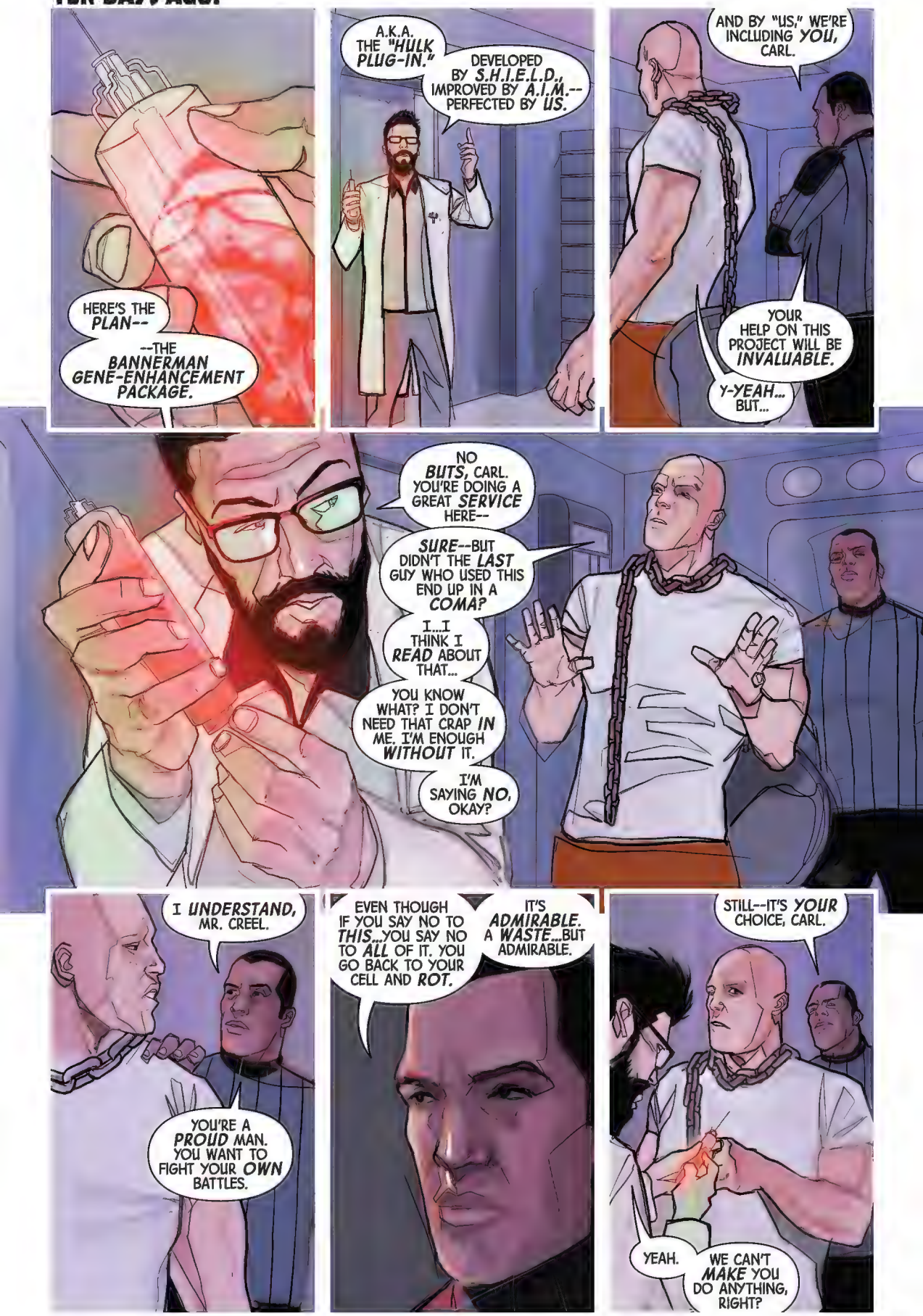
NOW.
THANKS FOR ANSWERING MY QUESTIONS, SIR.
SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAD A LUCKY ESCAPE.
LUCKY?
HE... HE SMASHED EVERYTHING... EVERYTHING I OWN...
'CEPT FOR THIS SHIRT...
WELL, LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE.
HE LET YOU LIVE.
THANKS AGAIN.
HUH?
THIS IS AGENT BURBANK CALLING SHADOW BASE. LINE SECURE?
PUM
GOOD TO GO, AGENT.
GOTTA SAY, PIGGYBACKING ON 9-1-1 WAS SMART--I GOT TO THE WITNESS WELL BEFORE THE COPS WILL.
HULK SIGHTING CONFIRMED--AND MY SENSORS SHOW A GAMMA TRAIL LEADING IN A VERY PARTICULAR DIRECTION.
TELL RED DOG WE KNOW WHERE HE'S GOING.
HOME.
HE'S GOING HOME.

TWO WEEKS AGO.
ANY WORD FROM HOME?
MS. MACPHERRAN SENDS HER LOVE.
SHE SAYS IF POSSIBLE SHE WANTS TO, AH...TRY TO EXPEDITE YOUR--
NO WAY, KRASK. SHE'S ONTO A GOOD THING WITH ROXXON--SHE DON'T NEED TO RISK THAT FOR ME.
TELL HER I'LL MANAGE ON MY OWN.
OF COURSE. UNDERSTOOD.
THIS ROXXON JOB...I'M SURPRISED YOU WEREN'T APPROACHED FOR THAT TOO, CARL.
I TURNED IT DOWN.
I HAD THE DIAMOND SCORE LINED UP ALREADY--WORKED IT ALL OUT MYSELF, EVERY DETAIL.
THEN MARY COMES THROUGH THE DOOR WITH THIS CORPORATE GIG. SHE LIKES IT BETTER--MONEY'S DECENT, IT'S LEGITIMATE...
...ONLY IT AIN'T MINE, Y'KNOW? I DIDN'T PUT IT TOGETHER. SO WE ARGUE--AND THEN I GO DO MY THING.
AND HERE I AM.
PRIDE. IT'S A KILLER.
WE DONE FOR TODAY, KENNY?
ACTUALLY...
...WELL...
...SPEAKING OF, AH...BEING APPROACHED...
I ALSO REPRESENT CARL BURBANK. BUSHWACKER. HE RECENTLY LEFT THIS FACILITY.
AND IF YOU WANTED TO LEAVE...NO QUESTIONS ASKED...
...I COULD PERHAPS ARRANGE A SIMILAR ROUTE.

NOW.
I KNOW THE WAY FROM HERE. THIS CLOSE, THERE'S A PULL.
OLD GHOSTS, CALLING ME BACK.
THIS WASN'T WHERE I WAS BORN.
I WAS ALREADY THERE WHEN BANNER KILLED HIS FATHER. I WAS THERE WHEN HIS FATHER KILLED PART OF HIM.
MAYBE I WAS ALWAYS THERE.
BUT THIS IS WHERE I FIRST TOOK A BREATH. WHERE I MADE MY MARK.
WHERE I GOT MY NAME...
THAT--THAT HULK--
LOS DIABLOS. TEST SITE FOR THE FIRST GAMMA BOMB.
MY PLACE OF POWER. THE PLACE WHERE I'M STRONGEST.
WELCOME HOME.


ELEVEN DAYS AGO.
WELCOME TO SHADOW BASE, MR. CREEL. I'M GLAD YOU TOOK OUR OFFER SERIOUSLY.
I'M GENERAL REGINALD FORTEAN. THIS IS OUR HEAD OF RESEARCH, DR. JEFF CLIVE.
YEAH, SURE.
NICE PLACE...
ONE OF SEVERAL. WHEN IT COMES TO THE HULK, UNCLE SAM--AND HIS FRIENDS--HAVE DEEP POCKETS.
WHICH IS WHY YOU'RE HERE, "ABSORBING MAN."
AFTER ALL, YOU ARE ONE OF THE HULK'S GREATEST ENEMIES...
...
IS THAT A JOKE?
HE PULVERIZED ME. LITERALLY. I'VE NEVER WON A FIGHT WITH THE GUY--
BUT YOU COULD--WITH OUR HELP.
LET'S NOT PRETEND, CREEL. YOU'VE MELLOWED, BUT YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED.
PART OF YOU IS STILL NURSING YOUR PRIDE OVER ALL THOSE FIGHTS. PART OF YOU WANTS A REMATCH.
YOU WANT TO BE STRONGER.
ISN'T THAT THE REAL REASON YOU'RE HERE?

NOW.
I'M HERE FOR A REASON.
LANGKOWSKI KILLED FOUR PEOPLE IN A MINNESOTA HOSPITAL. SOMETHING HAD GOTTEN INTO HIM.
THEN IT GOT INTO ME.
IT'S WEARING THE FACE OF BANNER'S FATHER.
THE FACE WE HATE.
WE NEED TO GET IT OUT OF US.
AND FOR THAT, WE NEED TO BE STRONGER.
SO WE'RE HERE. ON MY GROUND. WHERE I CAN WIN.
I CAN SMASH HIM.
THAT'S THE PLAN...
...
BUT IT'S NOT MY PLAN.
IS IT?


TEN DAYS AGO.
HERE'S THE PLAN--
--THE BANNERMAN GENE-ENHANCEMENT PACKAGE.
A.K.A. THE "HULK PLUG-IN."
DEVELOPED BY S.H.I.E.L.D., IMPROVED BY A.I.M.-- PERFECTED BY US.
AND BY "US," WE'RE INCLUDING YOU, CARL.
YOUR HELP ON THIS PROJECT WILL BE INVALUABLE.
Y-YEAH... BUT...
NO BUTS, CARL. YOU'RE DOING A GREAT SERVICE HERE--
SURE--BUT DIDN'T THE LAST GUY WHO USED THIS END UP IN A COMA?
I...I THINK I READ ABOUT THAT...
YOU KNOW WHAT? I DON'T NEED THAT CRAP IN ME. I'M ENOUGH WITHOUT IT.
I'M SAYING NO, OKAY?
I UNDERSTAND, MR. CREEL.
YOU'RE A PROUD MAN. YOU WANT TO FIGHT YOUR OWN BATTLES.
EVEN THOUGH IF YOU SAY NO TO THIS...YOU SAY NO TO ALL OF IT. YOU GO BACK TO YOUR CELL AND ROT.
IT'S ADMIRABLE. A WASTE...BUT ADMIRABLE.
STILL--IT'S YOUR CHOICE, CARL.
YEAH.
WE CAN'T MAKE YOU DO ANYTHING, RIGHT?

NOW.
IT WAS YOU.
YOU PUT IT IN OUR HEAD--THE WHOLE IDEA. COMING HERE.
BECAUSE THIS IS YOUR GROUND TOO. YOUR PLACE OF POWER.
THIS ISN'T WHERE I GET RID OF YOU.
IT'S WHERE YOU GET RID OF ME.
YEAH?
YOU THINK YOU CAN?
COME ON OUT, DAD! LET'S SEE IT HAPPEN!
GET OUT HERE!
GET OUT OF MY HEAD AND FIGHT!

FIVE DAYS AGO.
GET OUTTA HERE.
I'M RED NOW?
RED'S A GOOD COLOR FOR US. DON'T WORRY--IT SHOULDN'T BE PERMANENT.
YEAH? I'LL HOLD YOU TO THAT, DOC.
I'M KIND OF PROUD OF MY LOOKS...
HOLD THIS, PLEASE.
HUH?
WHAT'S THIS NOW?
DEREK? OH, HE'S PART OF ANOTHER PROJECT. CUTE LITTLE GUY, HUH?
SEE, HERE'S THE THING. THE ORIGINAL RED HULK HAD AN ENERGY-ABSORPTION POWER. AND BANNER TOOK DOWN THE SECOND ONE USING A SIMILAR ABILITY.
SO, GIVEN YOUR, AH, GOD-GIVEN TALENT, SO TO SPEAK...
...WELL, TRY ABSORBING DEREK'S CUTE LITTLE GAMMA POWER.
OKAY. SURE.
ALL I GOTTA DO IS...
...CONCENTRATE...
VERY NICE.
I THINK THAT'S A SUCCESSFUL TRIAL, DON'T YOU?

NOW.
NICE...NICE TRY. GETTING ME MAD...
YOU WANT ME TO FIGHT. YOU THINK THAT'S HOW YOU GET ME.
MIGHT HAVE WORKED ON ANOTHER HULK. BUT NOT ME.
I'M IN CONTROL.
I'LL FIND ANOTHER WAY TO GET RID OF YOU. HOWEVER I HAVE TO.
BUT I'M DONE PLAYING YOUR--
WAIT.
WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

TWENTY MINUTES AGO.
PRIDE BEFORE A FALL...
WHAT ARE YOU MUMBLING ABOUT, CREEL?
NOT MUCH, GENERAL. JUST HOW I GOT MYSELF INTO THIS MESS, IS ALL.
AND HOW MAYBE IT WAS BETTER TO BE A MAN IN JAIL THAN SOME...RED FREAK...
PRIDE, HUH? IT'S A KILLER.
IT IS.
AND SO IS THE HULK.
ACCORDING TO SECURITY FOOTAGE, HE MURDERED JEFFREY CLIVE YESTERDAY MORNING.
ABSORBED HIM, IN FACT.
THERE'S AN IRONY, EH?
YESTERDAY-- THE HULK WAS HERE? WHY WASN'T I--
HE WAS NO THREAT-- UNTIL HE WAS. YOU WEREN'T REQUIRED.
BUT YOU ARE NOW.
BURBANK CALLED IN. WE HAVE A PREDICTED LOCATION.
CODENAME RED DOG...
...CONSIDER YOURSELF OFF THE LEASH.

NOW.
KRAKOOM
HULK!
COME ON, YOU PSYCHO! BACK IN THE RING! LET'S MAKE THIS HAPPEN!
I KNOW HIM. CREEL-- THE ABSORBING MAN. HE'S HAD AN UPGRADE.
WHAT'S HE YELLING ABOUT?
MAKE THIS WORTH IT!
THIS IS YOU, ISN'T IT, DAD? ANOTHER TRICK. SOME NEW PLAN...
I'M NOT GONNA GET MAD.
I'M IN CONTROL.

I KNOW HOW CREEL SEES THIS. ONE LOOK, AND YOU CAN TELL.
IT'S A PRIDE THING FOR HIM.
BUT THAT'S NOT ME. I'M IN CONTROL.
I DON'T NEED THIS.
I DON'T NEED THIS!
YEAH.
YOU DO.

SECONDS OUT--ROUND ONE--
CUTE. WHAT IS THIS, ROCKY IV?
LEMME HELP WITH THAT.
"IF HE DIES...
"...HE DIES!"
WHAMM
ARRRHHH--
WHAT THE HELL? MY HAND...
HITTING HIM HURTS ME. BUT... NOT HIM...
HA! NOT SO EASY NOW, HUH?

I'M IN TROUBLE.
NOT SO EASY!
CAN'T EVEN BLOCK HIS--HIS DUMB BALL AND CHAIN--
IT'S DRAINING ME.
LIKE I DRAINED LANGKOWSKI. THAT CAN'T HAPPEN. NOT TO ME.
LOOK AT THIS JERK--
I KNOW HOW HE SEES THIS. HE'S THE HEEL TURNED FACE. THE GUY WHO TURNED IT AROUND.
HIS BIG, FLASHY HERO FIGHT. MAKE THE MONSTER WEAK-- MAKE ME BEG--
PROUDEST MOMENT OF THE CREEP'S LIFE.
IF THIS IS YOU... YOU WIN, DAD.
GET--

YOU GOT ME MAD.
--OFF!
AND THE MADDER I GET...
WH... WHAT...
HE SOUNDS DAZED-- LIKE HE'S GONE SOMEWHERE. SO I CAN HURT HIM.
OR HE DRAINED TOO MUCH, TOO FAST.
HUH?
OR MAYBE...
...WHEN I DRAINED LANGKOWSKI'S GAMMA...SOMETHING GOT INTO ME.
MY FACE...?
AND NOW CREEL'S DRAINED MINE...
HNH.
ROUND TWO.

SOMEWHERE ELSE.
WH... WHAT...?
WHAT ARE YOU?
YOU CANNOT SEE WHAT I AM. YOU'RE SPEAKING TO A MASK, CARL CREEL.
YOUR BODY IS ABOVE US. YOUR MALLEABLE BODY. YOUR USEFUL BODY.
BUT YOU ARE HERE. BELOW ALL.
YOU HAD MANY CHANCES TO TURN BACK--BUT YOU'LL ALWAYS END UP HERE AT THE END. THERE'S NO CHANGING YOUR FATE.
YOU'RE A CREATURE OF SIN, CARL.
THE OLDEST SIN. THE SIN OF PRIDE.
IT'S A KILLER...

# THE SINNERS

10

"Green door, what's that secret you're keepin'?"

– MARVIN MOORE
LYRICS TO "THE GREEN DOOR"

ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
DR. LANGKOWSKI?
WE GOT A HIT.
POSITIVE I.D. ON BANNER'S GAMMA SIGNATURE-- LOS DIABLOS, NEW MEXICO.
WE DONE FOUND US A HULK, LADIES AND GENTS.
LOS DIABLOS... ISN'T THAT THE TEST SITE WHERE BANNER BECAME THE HULK? CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER.
WHO'S UP FOR A FIELD TRIP?
I'M IN.
JACKIE?
I DON'T KNOW. ACTUALLY GOING ON A MISSION WITH, UH...
GAMMA FLIGHT.
...RIGHT. WELL, IT STILL FEELS LIKE CROSSING A LINE. IS THIS GOING TO BE REAL REPORTING OR PUBLIC RELATIONS?
REAL. WARTS AND ALL. I PROMISE--
UH... LANGKOWSKI?
YES, ROMESH?
SOMETHING WEIRD ON THE SCREEN.
LOOKS LIKE...THERE'S TWO OF 'EM.

"WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT MEANS?"

SOMEWHERE ELSE.

I'M SORRY.

I'M SORRY.

I'M SORRY.

NEW MEXICO.

UMM

SOHH

REE

NOT *YET.*

BUT YOU'RE *GONNA* BE.

HOLY CRAP.

YOU DON'T SEE *THAT* EVERY DAY.

AGENT BURBANK CALLING SHADOW BASE. LINE SECURE?
GOOD TO GO, AGENT.
PUT ME THROUGH TO GENERAL FORTEAN...
SHADOW BASE.
...REPEAT THAT, BURBANK. I WANT TO MAKE SURE I HEARD YOU.
WHAT EXACTLY HAS HAPPENED TO THE ABSORBING MAN?
PATCH INTO MY VISUAL FEED AND SEE FOR YOURSELF, SIR.
WHAT HIS BODY'S DONE TO ITSELF... HE SHOULD BE DEAD. BUT... HE'S NOT.
HE'S WINNING.

UMM
SOHH
NNHHH--
NOBODY--
REE
NOBODY CARES!
YEAH, THAT'S IT. YOU DRAIN THE GAMMA IN ME--I TAKE IT RIGHT BACK. STALEMATE.
YOU AIN'T TAKING ANY MORE OF ME, CREEL--
WHUD
URRHH!
--BUT I'M GONNA TAKE SOME OF YOU.

C'MERE!
SURVIVE
YEAH?
THAT HURT?
WHAT COMES AROUND, CREEL.
HERE'S MY BALL AND CHAIN.

KRAK
OUCH.
HULK'S FIGHTING BACK, GENERAL. HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW CREEL'S ALIVE.
GOT A CLEAR SHOT IF YOU WANT ME TO TAKE IT--
NEGATIVE. NOT YET.
BREAK COVER AND YOU LOSE YOUR EFFECTIVENESS-- PROBABLY THAT GUN-ARM OF YOURS TOO. WE SHOULD WAIT.
THAT'S MY THINKING.

"WAIT FOR THE MOMENT."
COMING UP ON THE TARGET AREA, FOLKS.
THE GAMMA SIGNATURE'S STILL DOING THAT WEIRD DOUBLED-UP THING...
SO, WHAT...THERE'S A SECOND HULK?
IF WALT HERE ISN'T SASQUATCH, MAYBE SOMEONE ELSE IS, EH?
GLAD I CAME PREPARED...
WAIT--I THINK I SEE SOMETHING--
--OH.
OH GOOD.
HE'S TORN SOMEONE IN HALF.
I'LL GET THE GUN--
HULK--THIS IS, UH, THIS IS WALTER SPEAKING.
LANGKOWSKI? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
WE DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE HERE--BUT WE DO HAVE WEAPONS LOCKED, SO--
"BINGO."

THERE IT IS. THE MOMENT.
SKLUTCH
SWITCH TO CYANIDE HOLLOW-POINTS--
--LET'S MAKE THIS HURT.
BDAHHM
AGARRHH--
THAT WASN'T ME.
HHRRR... HUHH...

HULLLLKK--
HE'S GOT US! BRACE!
CRASH POSITIONS!
--SMAAASH!
WHAMM
THAT'S ONE IN THE EYE FOR--
WAIT. HOLD UP.
WHERE'S CREEL GOING?

I'M NOT SURE, AGENT BURBANK. HE HAD CLEAR ORDERS TO SUBDUE THE HULK--BUT GIVEN THE DAMAGE HE'S TAKEN...
...WELL, IT'S POSSIBLE HE'S NO LONGER FULLY IN CONTROL OF HIS OWN ACTIONS.
"THE QUESTION IS...CAN HE RETURN FROM THAT STATE?"
CRRRHH... CREEEEL...?
HEADING TOWARD... BOMB SITE...
GAMMA BOMB SITE... BANNER'S BOMB...
FIRST... FIRST EVER...
OH.
THE GREEN DOOR.
I KNOW WHAT HE WANTS.

I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT, YOU SON OF A--
YEAH, YEAH.
I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT.
A SPARE COUPLE OF VERTEBRAE.
DON'T YOU--
KZOW
AARRHH--
THIS IS OUT OF CONTROL.
GENERAL FORTEAN--I NEED ORDERS, SIR--
"--IS THIS STILL PART OF THE PLAN?"

UMM
SOHH
STOP HIM--STOP-- CREEL--
WHAT'S INSIDE HIM-- KNOW WHAT IT WANTS--
SURE. JUST STAY DOWN, EH?
SOHH
REE
KRNCH
GAMMA. GOT ALL HE CAN GET FROM ME.
HE'S AFTER THE REST.
HOLY--

LISTEN. WHEN THE BOMB WENT OFF, IT OPENED A *DOOR.* A *GREEN* DOOR.

ONLY IT DIDN'T OPEN *ALL THE WAY.*

BUT IF CREEL *ABSORBS* THE GAMMA IN THE *SOIL* HERE--IN THE *AIR--*

--IF HE *USES* IT, RIGHT *HERE--* TO *FINISH* THE JOB, TO *TEAR OPEN THAT DOOR--*

WHAT? WHAT *HAPPENS?*

*TELL* ME!

WHAT'S GOING TO

JUDD! I CAN'T SEE YOU!
JACKIE!
WHERE ARE YOU--

...
HERE WE ARE AGAIN...

GENERAL?
GENERAL, SAY SOMETHING--

I'M SORRY.
I'M SO SORRY.

WALTER? PUCK?
CAN YOU HEAR ME?
WHERE ARE YOU?

WHERE--
OH.

HULK...?

WE WERE TOO LATE.
THE DOOR OPENED.

WHERE ARE WE?
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?

WE'RE WHERE WE'VE *ALWAYS* BEEN.

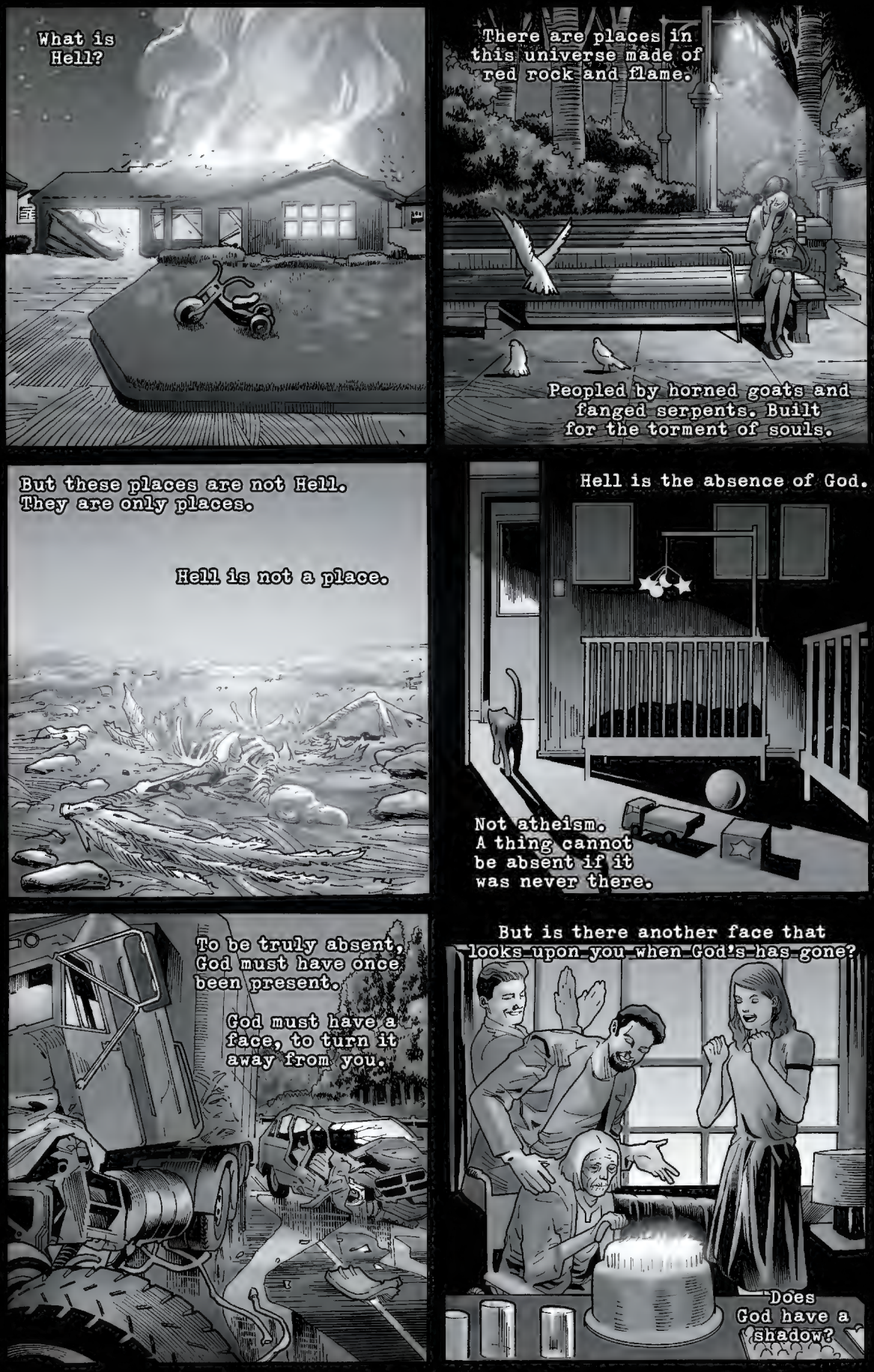
WHERE *EVERYBODY'S* ALWAYS BEEN.

# THAUMIEL

11

"HELL IS EMPTY, AND ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE."

– WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
*THE TEMPEST*


What is Hell?
There are places in this universe made of red rock and flame.
Peopled by horned goats and fanged serpents. Built for the torment of souls.
But these places are not Hell. They are only places.
Hell is not a place.
Hell is the absence of God.
Not atheism. A thing cannot be absent if it was never there.
To be truly absent, God must have once been present.
God must have a face, to turn it away from you.
But is there another face that looks upon you when God's has gone?
Does God have a shadow?

Does God have a Hulk?

BELOW.

HELLSTROM

HOTEL HELL ST

"HOW DO I GET TO BE WHAT YOU ARE?"

WHAT?

I LET YOU ASK ME *ONE QUESTION.* THAT WAS THE QUESTION.

"HOW DO I GET TO BE WHAT YOU ARE?"

*REALLY?* YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT THAT *NOW?*

I'D JUST SEEN A MAN *DIE,* I WASN'T EXACTLY *THINKING STRAIGHT--*

THAT'S WHEN THE TRUTH COMES *OUT.*

YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST TO GET OBSESSED BECAUSE I BROKE YOUR *HOUSE.* IT *HAPPENS.*

YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST TO WANT TO CLIMB INTO SOME *GAMMA MACHINE* EITHER.

PEOPLE SEE ME, THEY IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO *BE* ME--

YEAH?

SEE...I *CAN'T* IMAGINE IT. AT ALL.

WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE TO FEEL THAT *RAGE.* TO BE *ABLE* TO FEEL THAT RAGE.

TO BE *ALLOWED* TO FEEL IT.

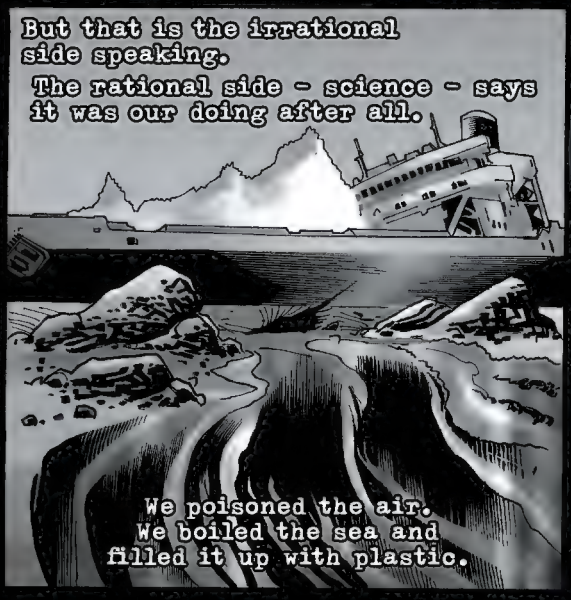
YOU SMASH TOWNS. YOU--UNFF!--RUIN LIVES. YOU'VE KILLED PEOPLE--NOT MANY, BUT YOU HAVE.
SIX MONTHS LATER, YOU'RE ON THE AVENGERS AGAIN, ALL IS FORGIVEN--
YOU KNOW I WAS SHOT INTO SPACE, RIGHT?
YEAH. YOU WERE SHOT INTO SPACE.
INSTEAD OF JUST SHOT.
HM.
YOU WRECK A CITY, AND DOCTOR STRANGE LOOKS FOR A RETIREMENT HOME FOR YOU. IRON MAN LOOKS FOR A PARADISE PLANET TO PUT YOU ON.
YOUR ANGER...IT'S INDULGED. EVEN RESPECTED.
MINE IS DISMISSED--IF I'M LUCKY.
WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF--OF MEN--WHITE, COLLEGE-EDUCATED MEN, MEN LIKE BRUCE BANNER--
--WHO JUST RANT AND SCREAM AND RAGE AND--SMASH THINGS--
--AND THE WORLD BENDS OVER BACKWARD TO UNDERSTAND THAT. TO REWARD IT.
SO...YEAH. I GUESS I'M ASKING.
HOW DO I GET MY PIECE OF THAT PIE, HULK?
HOW DO I GET TO BE WHAT YOU ARE?
...
HNH. THAT'S GOOD.
I LIKE THAT.

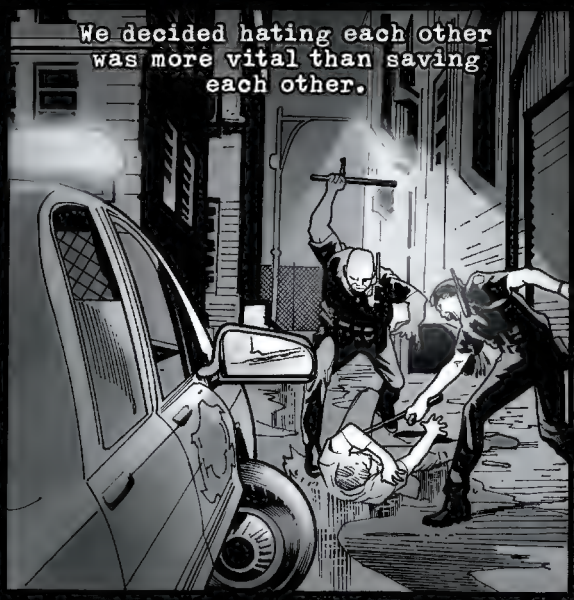
RIGHT. OF COURSE YOU DO.
HAVE A GOOD LAUGH AT THE--THE PUNY HUMAN--
NO. NOT THAT.
HOW YOU TALK ABOUT ANGER...LIKE IT'S SOMETHING THAT NEEDS LETTING OUT.
LIKE IT'S USEFUL. LIKE IT CAN GET THINGS DONE.
YOU DON'T LOCK IT AWAY, CALL IT ANOTHER NAME, PRETEND IT'S NOT YOU.
YOU'RE NOT ASHAMED OF IT.
THAT.
I LIKE THAT.
... BUT IF YOU COULD STEP INTO A GAMMA MACHINE-- YOU WOULD, RIGHT?
SURE.
WHO WOULDN'T?
WHAT'S IT LIKE, DOC?
BEIN' THE HULK?

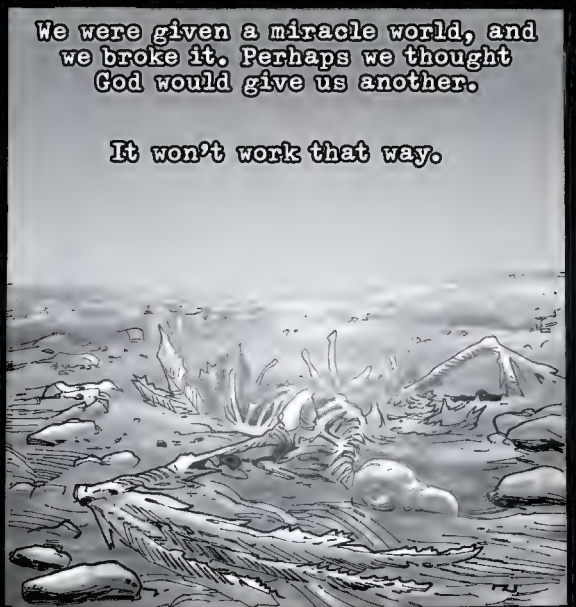
I'LL BET IT WAS A GAS.
...RICK JONES?
And what would that look like?

What is the anger of God?

We are told it is in the flood, or the storm.
Insurance men say that these are God's acts, against which we are unprotected.


But that is the irrational side speaking.
The rational side - science - says it was our doing after all.
We poisoned the air. We boiled the sea and filled it up with plastic.


We decided hating each other was more vital than saving each other.


We were given a miracle world, and we broke it. Perhaps we thought God would give us another.
It won't work that way.

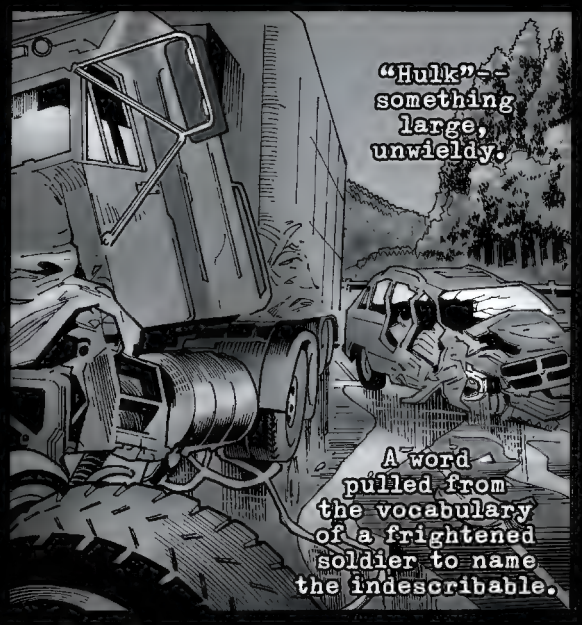
What is God's anger?
God's face, turning away.

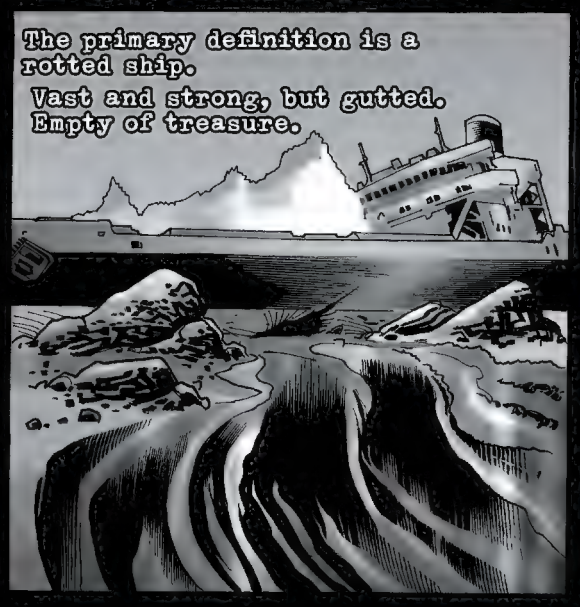
Leaving us alone with what we've done.
I'M SORRY.
I DID THIS. I LET THIS HAPPEN.
MY STUPID... PRIDE...
I LET THIS IN.
TRUST ME.
EVIL HAS ALWAYS BEEN IN.
WHO...?
EUGENE JUDD. CODENAME: PUCK. SOMETIMES IT'S FROM SHAKESPEARE, SOMETIMES IT'S A HOCKEY JOKE.
AND YOU... YOU, I RECOGNIZE. CRUSHER CREEL, EH? THE ABSORBING MAN.
YOU BECOME WHATEVER YOU TOUCH--I'M SURE THAT WAS USEFUL TO IT.

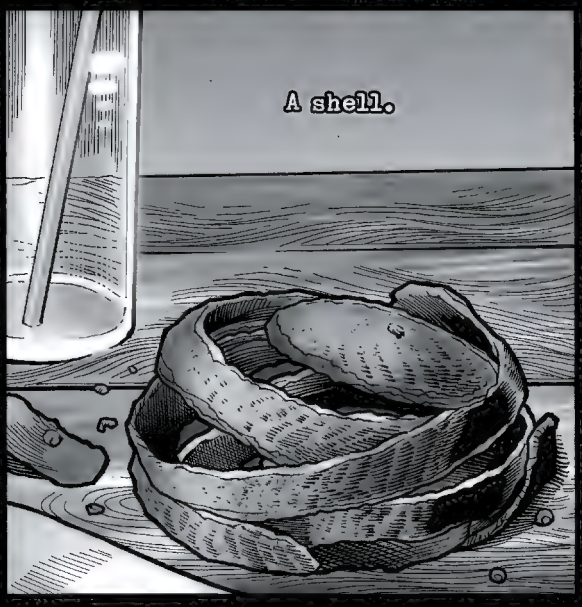
MAGIC, TOO--A GIFT FROM A GOD. DOESN'T FOLLOW SCIENTIFIC RULES.
I BET THAT'S WHY IT CHOSE YOU. IT'S BEEN PULLING STRINGS A WHILE NOW, EH?
REACHING IN WHERE IT'S STRONGEST...STROKING AND CAJOLING THE MINDS AROUND IT...
"IT"?
SURE. IT.
THE DEVIL.
EH?
NOW, I'VE MET A DEVIL. WHICH WAS FUN. BUT I THINK THIS... THIS IS THE DEFINITE ARTICLE.
THE PEAK OF MY CAREER...
H-HOW... HOW'D YOU FIND ME?
OH, I FOLLOWED CERTAIN INDICATORS. FIELDS OF FORCE. YOU'RE AN IMPORTANT MAN IN THESE PARTS, MR. CREEL.
YOU'RE THE KEY.

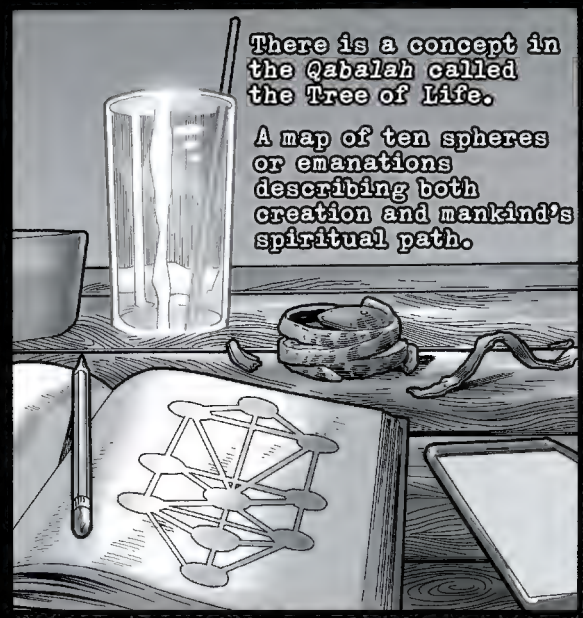
YOU'RE THE MAN WHO OPENED THE DOOR--AND YOU'RE GONNA HELP CLOSE IT.
FOLLOW ME.
WAIT-- WAIT A SECOND--
HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THIS? TALKIN' ABOUT THE DEVIL, ABOUT KEYS AND DOORS--HOW DO YOU KNOW? ABOUT THIS?
WHO ARE YOU?
WHEN I WAS EIGHT, I HUNTED MY FIRST BEAR. BIG GRIZZLY. THAT WAS 1922, IN THE YUKON, AND HE KEPT US THROUGH A COLD WINTER.
IN SPAIN, I FOUGHT BULLS AND FASCISTS--AND I LET THE BULLS LIVE. IN NEPAL, I HUNTED THE TIGER GOD AND KILLED ALL FEAR IN ME.
I'VE FOUGHT QUEENS OF DREAMS AND THE WORLD'S SECRET MASTER. I'VE FOUGHT DEMONS IN HELL AND STOLEN THEIR THRONES--AND THOSE THRONES HAVEN'T BOUND ME.
AND IT ALL COMES BACK TO ONE THING.
I WAS EIGHT, FULL OF BEAR MEAT AND ADVENTURE-- AND I MADE A VOW, MR. CREEL.
I VOWED I WOULD LIVE AN INTERESTING LIFE.
I THINK I'VE DONE OKAY SO FAR, EH?
Does that answer the question, though?

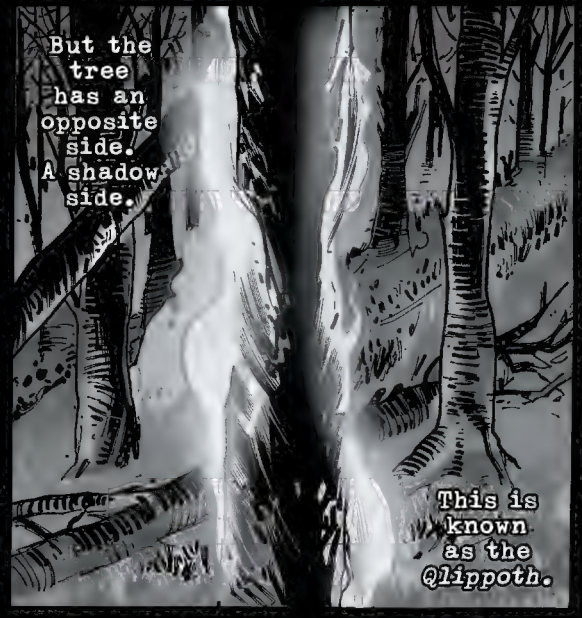
We can speak of the anger of God.
But does God have a Hulk?


"Hulk"--something large, unwieldy.
A word pulled from the vocabulary of a frightened soldier to name the indescribable.


The primary definition is a rotted ship.
Vast and strong, but gutted. Empty of treasure.


A shell.


There is a concept in the *Qabalah* called the Tree of Life.
A map of ten spheres or emanations describing both creation and mankind's spiritual path.


But the tree has an opposite side.
A shadow side.
This is known as the *Qlippoth*.

Qlippoth, meaning shells.
GOLLY, DOC.
YOU'RE IN REAL BAD SHAPE.
I THOUGHT RICK JONES WAS DEAD...
WHAT HAPPENED?
HE IS.
HIS EYES... ARE...ARE THEY EMPTY SOCKETS, OR...?
THEY'RE EMPTY, ALL RIGHT.
WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO, DOC?
HE'S HOLLOW INSIDE.
JUST A SKIN, REPEATING OLD LINES.
A SHELL...
BABY GIRL.
DON'T LOOK.
OH GOD.

DON'T LOOK HIM IN THE EYE.
OH GOD, NO--
LEMME GUESS. THE LATE MR. McGEE?
DAD--DAD, PLEASE--WE...WE HAVE TO GET YOU OUT OF HERE--
I KNOW IT'S NOT AS NICE AS THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD.
BUT IT'S ALL WE CAN AFFORD.
SINCE WHAT HAPPENED.
DAD-- PLEASE, JUST--
LEAVE HIM.
NO! GET OFF ME!
THIS IS-- THIS IS MY DAD--I CAN'T JUST--
IT ISN'T. NOT THE BIT THAT COUNTS.
WE NEED TO--
HOW DO YOU KNOW? HUH? WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT-- ABOUT THIS?
HE DIED FROM THE STRESS, YOU KNOW THAT?
TRYING TO PUT OUR LIVES BACK TOGETHER! HE WORKED HIMSELF TO DEATH!
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?
WHO CARES ABOUT YOU THAT MUCH?

WELL... THERE'S *THAT* GUY.
MILKSOP.
GOT NO *GUTS*.
*THUNDERBOLT ROSS*. BANNER'S FATHER-IN-LAW. *HE* CARED.
MAYBE NOT HOW YOU *MEANT* IT, BUT...
BUT...
...BUT THAT CAN'T BE *RIGHT*.
HE'S NOT *DEAD*.
IS HE?
"POWERFUL FORCES."
BAH.
A *BOMB*...

...IS A BOMB!
GOD--
THAT'S HOW MUCH HE CARED. ENOUGH TO MAKE SURE HE COULD KILL ME.
I'D TAKE A STEP BACK.
THERE HE IS.

THE DEMONIACAL HULK!
UNNHH--
NICE PUNCH... FROM A HOLLOW MAN...
BUT THEN, YOU ALWAYS WERE, WEREN'T YOU?
YOU WON'T.
ESCAPE ME AGAIN.
HULK!
ARHH--

JONES--YOU WERE A HULK TOO. YOU CAN CHANGE-- MAYBE STOP THIS BEFORE IT GETS ANY WORSE.
HULK NEEDS YOUR HELP--
NO HE DOESN'T, LADY.
HE JUST NEEDS A LITTLE PEACE AND QUIET. THAT'S ALL.
HRNNH--SO WHAT--HAPPENED, ROSS? YOU DIED AND IT STUCK THIS TIME? THINK THAT LETS YOU OFF?
YOU COULD'VE BEEN--HRRRHH-- A FATHER TO BANNER-- BUT YOU WOULDN'T LET HIM BE--
COULDN'T LEAVE US ALONE!
YOU'RE DEAD NOW? HRRH! GOOD!
I'LL KILL YOU TWICE!
KILL YOU!
MILK.
SOP.

KILL YOU!
HULK-- STOP IT! YOU'VE FINISHED HIM!
HULK--
HULK?
HE SOUNDS FIERCER.
CRUELER.
DANGEROUS.
HHHRRHH... HULK...KILL...

HULK KILL!
HULK KILL EVERYTHING!
In *Qabalah*, the highest point on the tree of life is called *Keter*. The crown, set above all things.
It is compassion beyond comprehension. The unity of the divine.
But on the opposite side is *Thaumiel*.
Where that great unity is split into contending forces, each existing at the expense of the other. Refusing to be as one.
I am no scholar. But if the *Qlippoth* is a reflection, then perhaps this shadow-sphere is the lowest point. Below all.
A Hell beneath all others.
Some would say such a realm has a single demonic representative. A single ruler.
Satan, the Adversary--he whose spiritual pride led to the fall.
But this is a place without unity.
THERE. YOU SEE?
JUST LIKE I'VE ALWAYS SAID. HE'S A *MONSTER*.
BELIEVE *ME*, SON...

# THIS WORLD OUR HELL

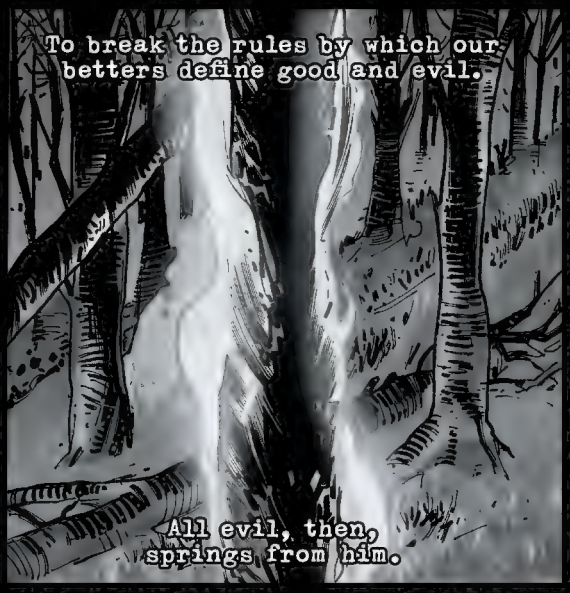
12

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."

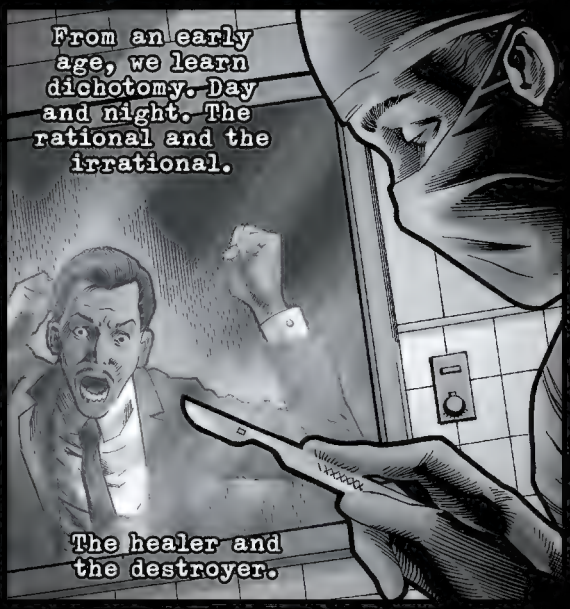
JOHN 8:44

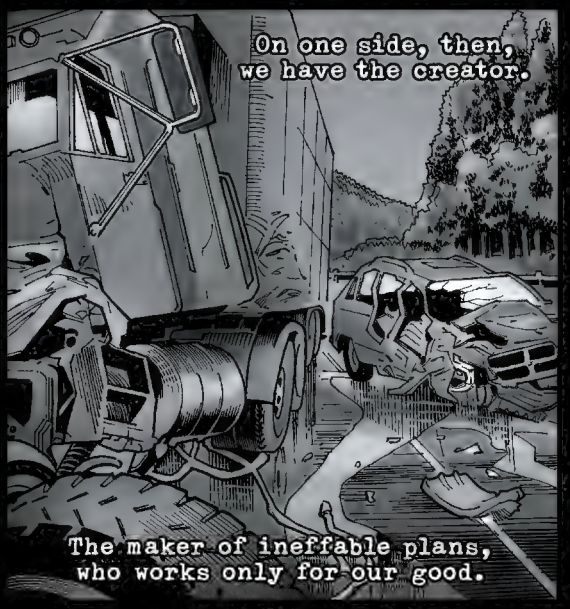
What is the Devil?

In modern culture, the Devil is clearly defined.
He is the slanderer, the whisperer in mankind's ear. Tempting us to sin against God.


To break the rules by which our betters define good and evil.
All evil, then, springs from him.

We are told.


From an early age, we learn dichotomy. Day and night. The rational and the irrational.
The healer and the destroyer.


On one side, then, we have the creator.
The maker of ineffable plans, who works only for our good.

The mysterious and heavenly father.
AAOWW!

MY FOOT--
DAMN YOU, BRUCE! WHAT HAVE I SAID ABOUT LEAVING THOSE BRICKS ON THE FLOOR?
BRIAN, DON'T SNAP AT HIM--

IT'S MY HOUSE, REBECCA! MY SON!
BAD ENOUGH HE SNEAKS EVERYWHERE, LIKE A, LIKE A RAT--HE COULD AT LEAST PICK UP AFTER HIMSELF--
--AND WILL YOU PLEASE STOP SNIVELLING!
GOD!

WHAT'S THIS EVEN SUPPOSED TO BE...?
...
WHAT? SPEAK UP, DAMMIT!

GAMMA.

OF COURSE IT IS.
"SCIENCE CITY GAMMA. MAKE OR UNMAKE A WORLD OF YOUR OWN, WITH REAL ELECTRONICS. AGES TWELVE AND UP."
TWELVE AND UP.
AN EDUCATIONAL TOY. TOO COMPLEX FOR A CHILD TWICE YOUR AGE.
AND THE INSTRUCTIONS ARE STILL IN THE BOX.
YOU THINK I'M A FOOL? EH?
DO YOU HONESTLY THINK I DON'T KNOW?
BRIAN, PLEASE-- HE'S YOUR SON--
I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT HE IS!
BRIAN, PLEASE--
NOW LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE!
LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO YOUR MOTHER!
BEFORE YOU-- SHE WAS HAPPY! SHE WAS ALIVE! BEFORE YOU!
YOU DAMNED, DISGUSTING LITTLE--
--MONSTER!

...
I...
I'M...
...GOING TO MY STUDY.
YOU BREAK ALL THIS NONSENSE APART, DO YOU HEAR ME?
MOMMY?
DO...DO AS YOUR FATHER SAYS, DEAR.
I HAVE TO GO AND...AND THINK ABOUT THINGS...
'KAY.

SMASH.
SMASH.
SMASH.
And against the father... his monstrous ENEMY.
SMASH.
The breaker-apart.

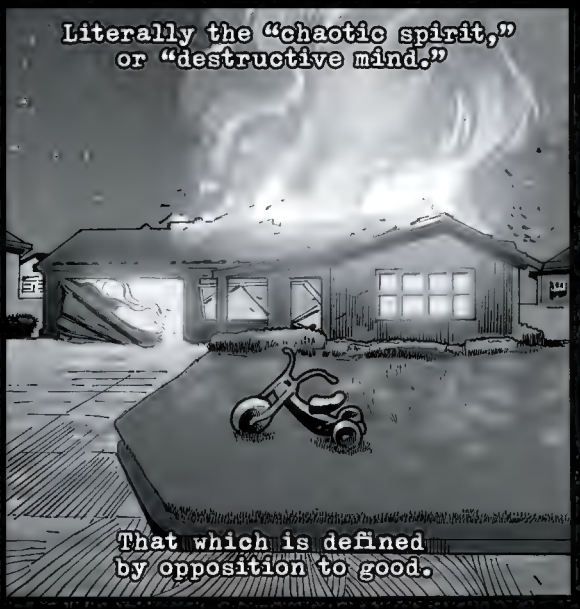
The force of CHAOS.
SMASSHH!
HULLLKK SMAAASSHH!
OH GOD.
OH GOD...
BELOW.

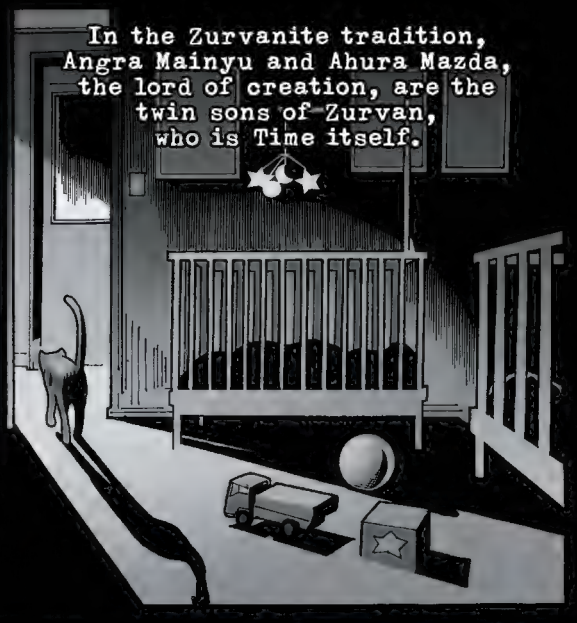
H-HULK--
HULK SMASH!
HULK KILL!
KILL EVERYTHING!
HUH- HULK--HULK-- SMASH--
GOD.
WE--WE HAVE TO RUN, DAD--
DON'T.
LOOK HIM IN THE EYE.
LOOK HIM IN THE EYE.
ALL RIGHT, DAD.
BECAUSE IT'S YOU.

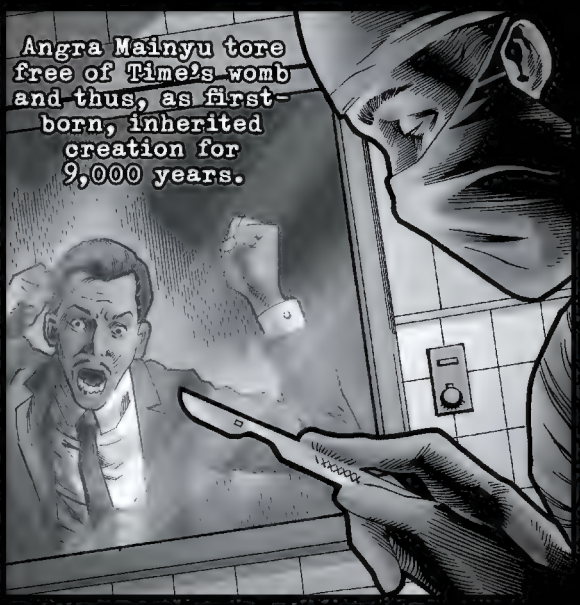
H-HULK.
SMASH.
I...HULK, JUST...
...JUST STOP. PLEASE. I--I NEED YOU TO STOP.
OKAY?
OKAY, BIG GUY?
HULK...
HULK HURTS.
ALL THE TIME HURTS. ALL THE TIME ALWAYS.
WHY?
WHY HULK HAVE TO HURT SO MUCH?

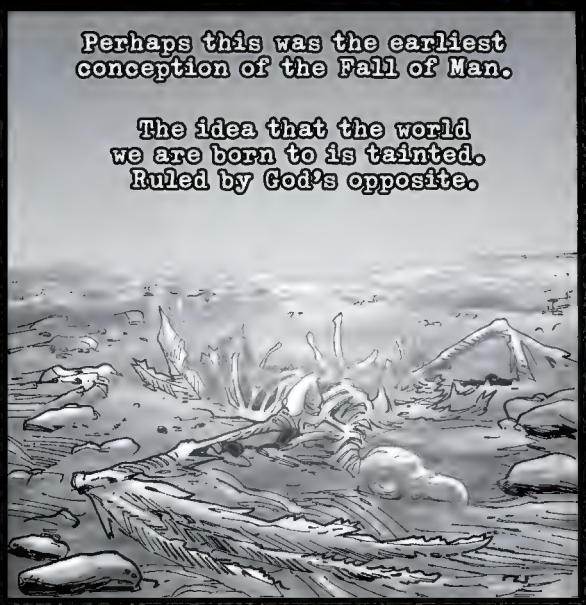
I...I DON'T KNOW.
I'M SORRY... I...
THE DEVIL HULK.
CAN I...CAN I SPEAK TO HIM? PLEASE?
CAN YOU LET HIM OUT FOR ME?
'KAY.
RRRRHH. SORRY.
THE BIG GUY, HE'S MOSTLY INSIDE THESE DAYS. BUT IF I REALLY LOSE IT...
...WELL, YOU SAW.
YEAH. I SAW.
ACTUALLY, I'VE GOT ANOTHER QUESTION.
EXACTLY HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN CHARGE?

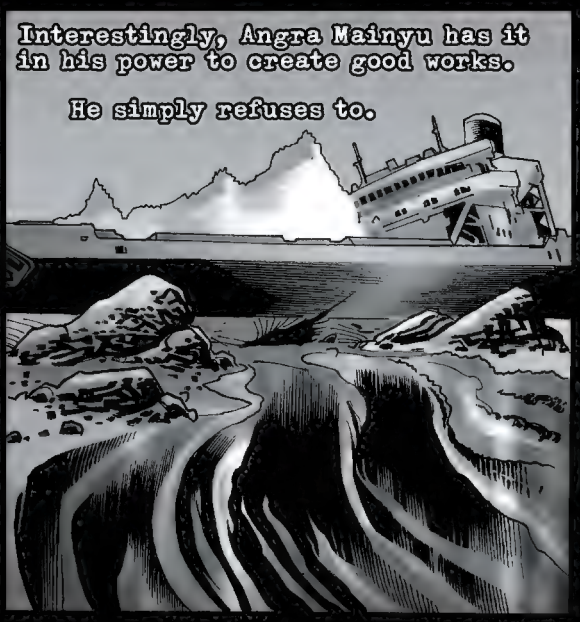
IN CHARGE OF *WHAT?*
DON'T PLAY DUMB.
BANNER HAS *DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER*-- THAT'S AN ESTABLISHED FACT. HE MIGHT BE THE MOST FAMOUS CASE IN THE *WORLD.*
AND YOU'RE ONE OF HIS *MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES*--HIS *ALTERS*, IF YOU LIKE THAT TERM--
I DON'T.
--YOU'RE A PART OF HIS *SYSTEM.*
EXCEPT *THESE* DAYS, YOU SEEM TO BE *RUNNING* IT.
*...SOMEBODY* HAD TO.
BUT NOT IN THE *DAY.* THAT'S *BANNER'S* TIME--
*YEAH?*
SO WHERE IS HE *NOW?*
...
I DON'T KNOW.
BUT I'VE GOT A PRETTY STRONG *HUNCH.*
LET'S GET MOVING.
Perhaps the earliest naming of the evil force is the Zoroastrian deity ANGRA MAINYU.

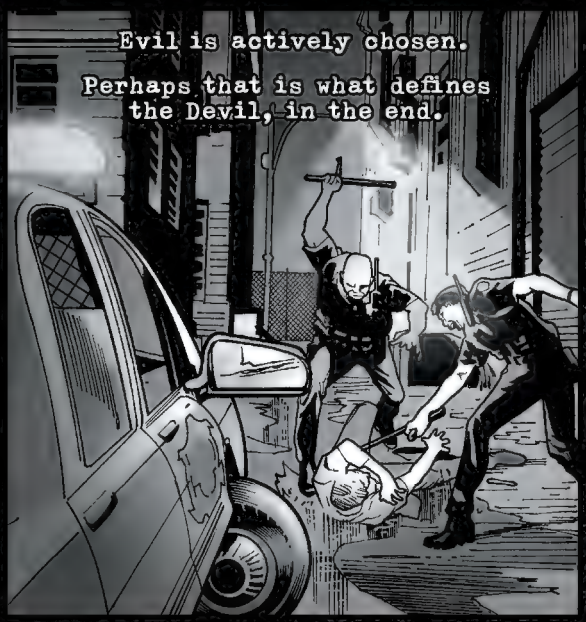

Literally the "chaotic spirit," or "destructive mind."
That which is defined by opposition to good.

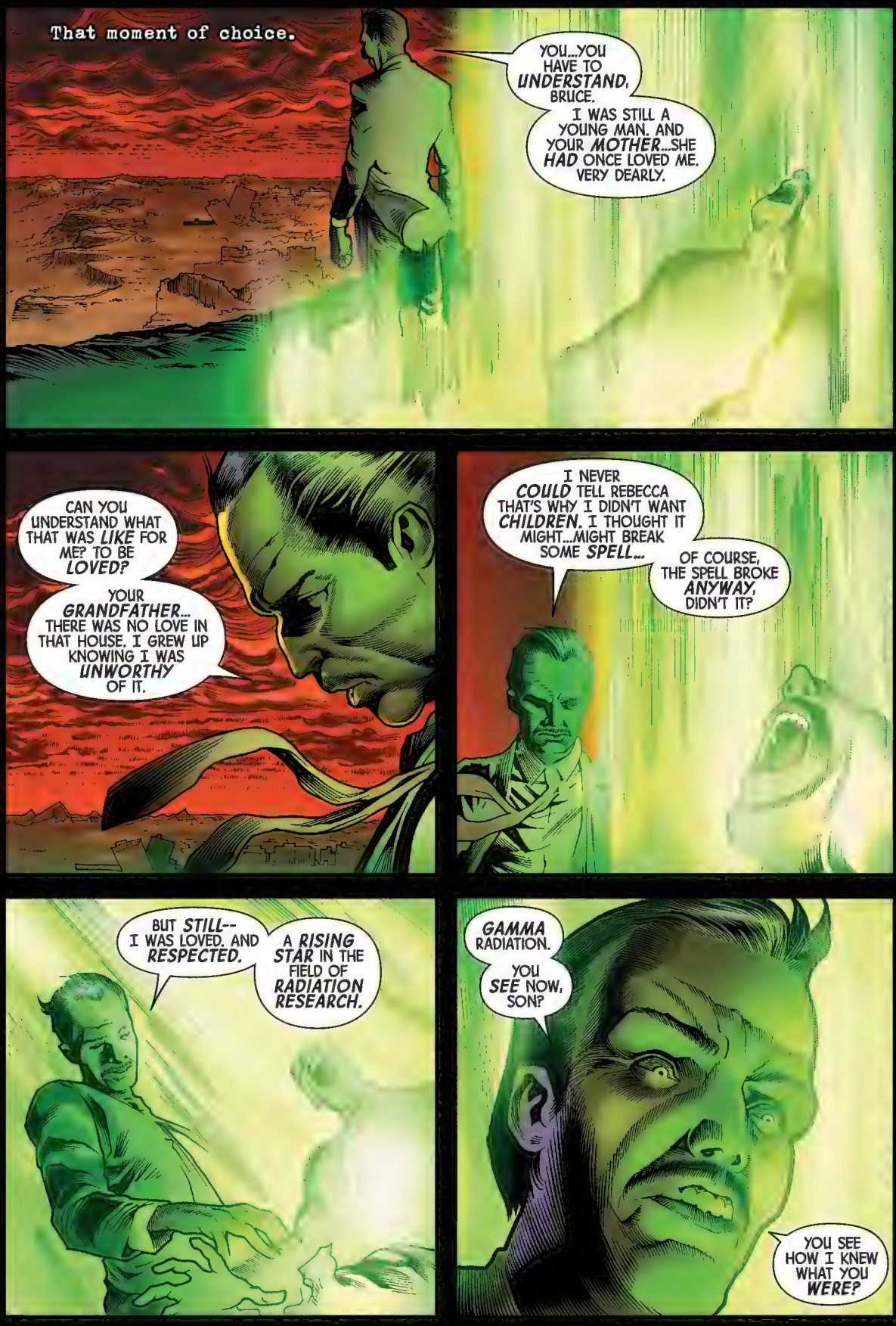

In the Zurvanite tradition, Angra Mainyu and Ahura Mazda, the lord of creation, are the twin sons of Zurvan, who is Time itself.


Angra Mainyu tore free of Time's womb and thus, as first-born, inherited creation for 9,000 years.


Perhaps this was the earliest conception of the Fall of Man.
The idea that the world we are born to is tainted. Ruled by God's opposite.


Interestingly, Angra Mainyu has it in his power to create good works.
He simply refuses to.


Evil is actively chosen.
Perhaps that is what defines the Devil, in the end.


That moment of choice.
YOU...YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND, BRUCE.
I WAS STILL A YOUNG MAN. AND YOUR MOTHER...SHE HAD ONCE LOVED ME. VERY DEARLY.
CAN YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT WAS LIKE FOR ME? TO BE LOVED?
YOUR GRANDFATHER... THERE WAS NO LOVE IN THAT HOUSE. I GREW UP KNOWING I WAS UNWORTHY OF IT.
I NEVER COULD TELL REBECCA THAT'S WHY I DIDN'T WANT CHILDREN. I THOUGHT IT MIGHT...MIGHT BREAK SOME SPELL...
OF COURSE, THE SPELL BROKE ANYWAY, DIDN'T IT?
BUT STILL-- I WAS LOVED. AND RESPECTED.
A RISING STAR IN THE FIELD OF RADIATION RESEARCH.
GAMMA RADIATION.
YOU SEE NOW, SON?
YOU SEE HOW I KNEW WHAT YOU WERE?

"THE THEORY WAS SIMPLE. THERE WERE TIMES WHEN GAMMA RADIATION BEHAVED...UNPREDICTABLY.
"OUTLIER RESULTS. MINOR ANOMALIES. THAT'S ALL IT WAS--BACK THEN.
"I THOUGHT THERE WAS A SECRET THERE.
"THAT GAMMA MIGHT SOMETIMES ACT NOT AS A WAVE OR PARTICLE... BUT AS SOME UNKNOWN THIRD FORM.
"WHAT FORM? WHAT WOULD THAT BE?
"THE DEPARTMENT HEADS WERE SKEPTICAL--BUT INTRIGUED. THE HYPOTHESIS WAS DARING, THE EARLY RESULTS PROMISING.
"SO PROMISING THAT ONE DAY I STAYED LONG PAST MY REGULAR HOURS.
"LATE INTO THE NIGHT.
"INTO THE NIGHT.
"AND SOMETIME IN THAT DARKNESS--EXHAUSTED FROM SEARCHING FOR MY GREAT SECRET--
"--I CLOSED MY EYES FOR A MOMENT--
"AND SAW THAT SOMETHING
"WAS SEARCHING
"FOR ME.

"NEXT MORNING, I TOLD THE DEPARTMENT HEADS THEY WERE RIGHT-- IT WAS NONSENSE.
"THE RESPECT THEY'D HAD FOR ME NEVER QUITE RETURNED.
"I TOLD MYSELF IT WAS ONLY A DREAM. BUT OF COURSE, THAT MEANT NOTHING.
"DREAMS ARE BINDING. AND I'D SEEN WHAT I HAD SEEN.
"A GROTESQUE PRESENCE, GLIMPSED THROUGH A CRACK IN A DOOR.
"A NIGHTMARE CELLAR-WORLD UNDERNEATH THE FLOORBOARDS OF EVERYTHING.
"I HAD SEEN ITS TERRIBLE EYE, AND NOW NOTHING COULD EVER BE THE SAME.
"EVERYTHING WAS CHANGED.
BRIAN? YOU'RE BACK?
REBECCA?
WHY...WHY IS THERE CHAMPAGNE?
I WAS GOING TO CALL YOU AT WORK, BUT... I WANTED IT TO BE A SURPRISE.
I'M PREGNANT, BRIAN.
"AND I WAS DAMNED.

"NINE MONTHS LATER, YOU WERE BORN.
"A DIFFICULT BIRTH. YOU WERE ALL BUT TORN FROM THE WOMB--REBECCA NEARLY DIED.
"IT DIDN'T MATTER. I'D BEEN REPLACED.
"YOU TOOK THE LOVE I HAD FROM ME.
"YOU DID THAT, BRUCE.
"YOU."
YOU.
AND THEN YOU KILLED ME. YOUR OWN FATHER.
AT YOUR MOTHER'S GRAVE! IN COLD BLOOD--
NO.
NO, IT WASN'T YOU, BRUCE. I... I HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT.
IT WAS THE MONSTER WHO CAST ME DOWN TO HELL.

"AND THEN WHEN I TRIED TO--TO PROTEST THE INJUSTICE OF THAT--
"--THE MONSTER KILLED ME AGAIN. SENT ME TO A FARTHER HELL...A LOWER DEEP..!"

...WHERE THE THING FROM MY DREAM WAS WAITING FOR ME. HERE, BELOW EVERYTHING.
CREATION'S SECRET REFLECTION, VASTER THAN WE CAN SEE OR KNOW.

IT CAN ONLY INFLUENCE OUR WORLD, YOU SEE. TO WORK DIRECTLY...IT NEEDS A HOST PERSONALITY. A SOUL IT CAN SPEAK AND ACT THROUGH.
IT HAD ME FOR THAT.

BUT NOW... NOW IT HAS YOU. MY IMMORTAL SON, HEAVY WITH THE SECRET THIRD FORM OF LIGHT.
YOU CAN BRING OUR WORLD TO IT. THROUGH THE HOLE YOU TORE WITH YOUR BOMB. THE GREEN DOOR YOU OPENED.

AND YOU CAN SET ME FREE.
But there is another Devil.

In the Old Testament--the Book of Job--is the first mention of an entity bearing the name Satan.
THE SUN'S RISEN. HIGH NOON IN HELL.
HE'S COMING.
Meaning "accuser," or "adversary."
NOT MUCH FARTHER, CREEL.
ONCE WE GET OVER THIS RIDGE...
As one of God's angels, Satan is given permission to test Job, God's most pious servant.
I HOWL THROUGH MANY MOUTHS
A test that destroys all Job has. All that he is.
A test that scours him down to the soul.
...AH.
WHAT... PUCK, WHAT IS THAT...?
Job demands an answer from God. He demands to know why he was hurt so much.
I BREAK WITH MANY HANDS
Eventually, God responds.
But he does not speak in human terms.
WE'RE TOO LATE.

THEY ARE THEMSELVES

BUT THEY ARE ALSO ME

OH. OH NO.

WE'RE TOO *LATE.*

THIS IS... WHO CAN FIGHT THAT? HOW CAN WE *FIGHT* THAT?

IT'S THE *END.*

*HNH. THAT* CREEP?

*HE'S* NOT THE END OF THE WORLD, McGEE.

The 19th-century theosopher Anna Kingsford likewise speaks of Satan as an angel of God.

In her writings, he is the sifter of souls. The accuser, who brings judgment on all who fall short. The angel of wrath.

He is the keeper of the door, who holds the power to cast into Hell...

...

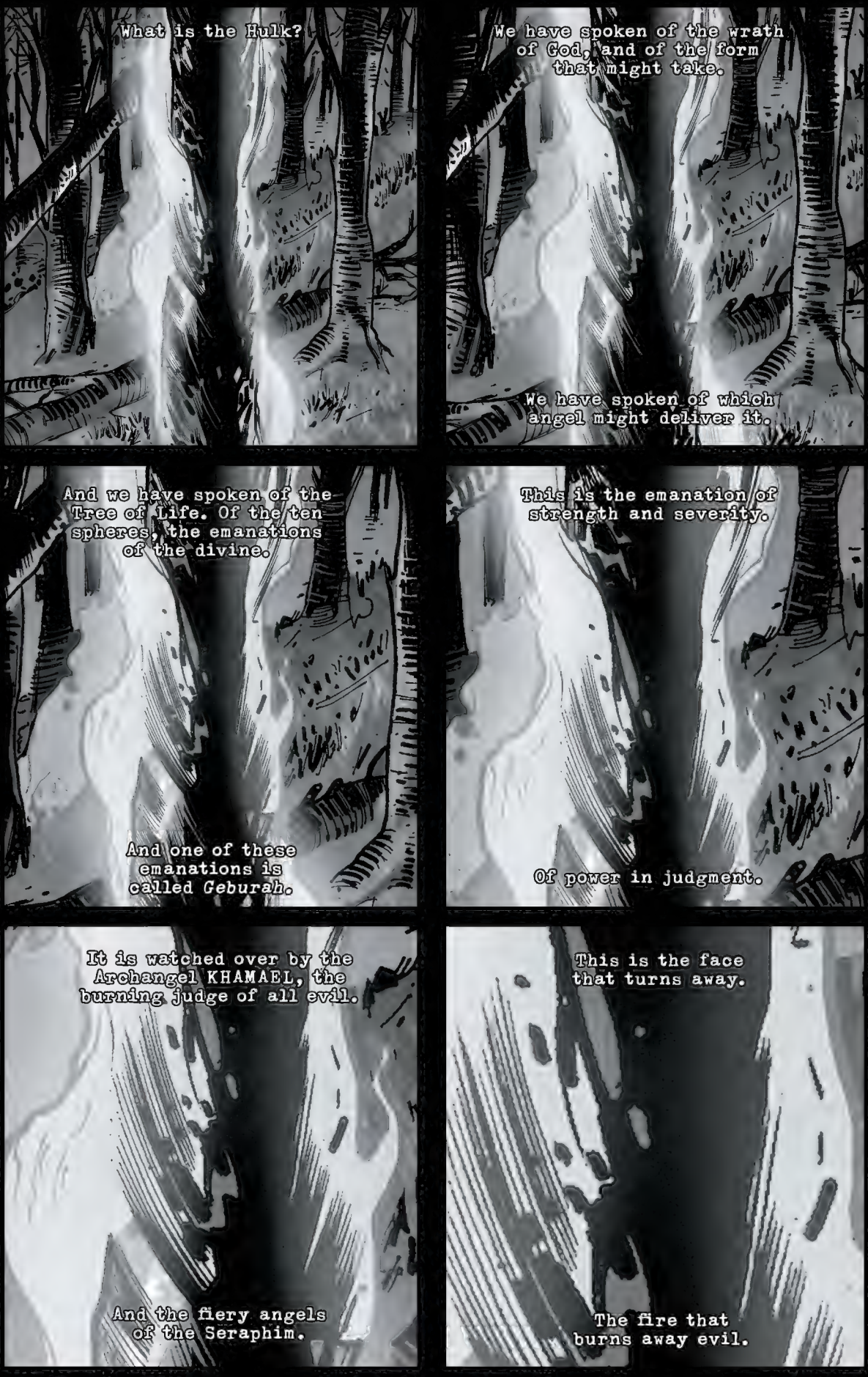
HOW DO YOU KNOW?

# ALL ON THAT DAY

13

"FATHERS AND TEACHERS, I PONDER, 'WHAT IS HELL?' I MAINTAIN THAT IT IS THE SUFFERING OF BEING UNABLE TO LOVE."

– FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY
*THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*


What is the Hulk?
We have spoken of the wrath of God, and of the form that might take.
We have spoken of which angel might deliver it.
And we have spoken of the Tree of Life. Of the ten spheres, the emanations of the divine.
And one of these emanations is called *Geburah*.
This is the emanation of strength and severity.
Of power in judgment.
It is watched over by the Archangel KHAMAEL, the burning judge of all evil.
And the fiery angels of the Seraphim.
This is the face that turns away.
The fire that burns away evil.

Burns it to its very root.

I HAVE ALL THE POWER YOU GIVE ME

AND MY WEAPON IS HATE

YEAH? THAT *ALL* YOU GOT, BIG MAN? AGAINST *ME*?

I'M THE *HULK!*

*I'M THE HULK!*

AND THIS IS MY HOUSE!
HE...HE CAN'T FIGHT THAT...
WHEN HIS BACK'S TURNED.
RUN. THAT WAY.
HE NEEDS HELP--
I'M THE--
CHRRMP
HHRAARGH!
THAT'S IT. BRING US THE LEFTOVERS.
BITE BY BITE...
COOL IT, MISTER.

NOTHIN' CAN MAKE ME RAT ON THE HULK.
"THERE'S AN IDEA IN SCIENCE CALLED THE *THEORY OF EVERYTHING.*
"THE HYPOTHETICAL *MASTER THEORY*--A COHERENT, UNIFIED FRAMEWORK OF PHYSICS THAT INCLUDES, EXPLAINS AND PREDICTS *ALL PHENOMENA.*"
SCIENCE HASN'T QUITE *FOUND* ONE YET.
THIS A *LECTURE TOUR,* JUDD? KEEP YOUR *VOICE* DOWN--
THE REASON *BEING,* MR. CREEL... IT'S *SCIENCE.* IT'S ONLY *HALF* THE PICTURE.
THERE IS *SCIENCE*-- BUT THERE IS ALSO *MAGIC,* EH?
AND *GAMMA* IS A LITTLE OF *BOTH.*

"GAMMA RADIATION IS SCIENCE. IT'S MEASURABLE, PREDICTABLE, IT HAS RULES...
"...UNTIL IT DOESN'T. UNTIL IT MAKES HULKS AND SASQUATCHES AND LEADERS. METAPHOR PEOPLE.
"UNTIL IT'S MAGIC.
"WHEN THE FIRST GAMMA BOMB WENT OFF, IT UNLEASHED FORCES BEYOND OUR CONTROL. UNIFIED FORCES.
"IT OPENED A DOOR, DEEP DOWN INTO THE PIT OF REALITY. INTO THE LOWEST HELL AND ANY HIGH CONCENTRATION OF GAMMA--THAT'S A DOOR TOO.
"INCLUDING GAMMA PEOPLE."
JONES--
DOORS THAT THING UP THERE CAN REACH THROUGH. CREATE LITTLE ZONES OF INFLUENCE. COMMUNICATE.
SOMETIMES EVEN TAKE OVER OUR PHYSICAL FORMS...
YEAH.
THAT, I GET.

RIGHT. IT USED YOU TO GET THE GAMMA OUT OF THE HULK. GUESS THE BANNER HALF CAME WITH IT.
MIGHT BE WHERE THE TRUE POWER LIES, EH?
SO...I HANDED IT THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM...
SO THIS IS ALL ON ME.
CREEL, WAIT--WE NEED TO PLAN THIS--
HEY, YOU!
WELL, WELL. THE "ABSORBING MAN." WE MEET AGAIN.
MR. MASK. I REMEMBER YOU. LEMME ABSORB THIS ROCK, AND WE'LL TALK.
YOU'RE BANNER'S DAD, AIN'TCHA? I READ UP ON YOU IN THE JOINT.
THE PAPERS DUG UP BANNER'S STORY BACK WHEN HE GOT OUTED--FIGURED KNOWIN' IT MIGHT HELP ME GET THE EDGE ON HIM.
JUST MADE ME SAD FOR THE GUY, THOUGH.
SEE...MY OLD MAN USED TO HIT ME TOO.
UNTIL I BEAT THE LIVING CRAP OUTTA HIM...
But there is another side to Geburah.

A Qlippoth.
AND NOW YOU'LL BEAT ME UP?
CRUSHER CREEL. THE HERO AT LAST.
THE PROUD FIGHTER OF EVIL.
WELL? TAKE YOUR SHOT...
DON'T DO IT, CREEL.
DON'T FALL FOR IT...
Which is called Golachab.
GET UP, JONES!
GET UP AND FIGHT!
NO ONE. EVER DID ANYTHING FOR ME BEFORE.
'CEPT YOU.
Where Geburah is strength in righteousness, Golachab is strength in destruction.
Strength for strength only.
A STRANGER.
JONES!

REMEMBER WHAT THE TV SAID.
LEAVE EVERYTHING BEHIND.
DAD, I-- I KNOW HE *KILLED* YOU-- BUT--
--BUT THEY'RE KILLING *HIM*. THEY'RE GOING TO KILL HIM RIGHT IN FRONT OF US.
I DON'T HATE HIM, DAD.
I JUST WANT HIM TO UNDERSTAND.
Strength without pity.
Strength without judgment.
...
NAH. I AIN'T GONNA FIGHT.
'CAUSE I'D *LOSE*.
BUT I KNOW A GUY WHO *DOESN'T*...
NO!

STOP! YOU CAN'T!

YOU CAN'T TAKE HIM AWAY FROM ME!

TOO LATE, PAL.

HERE COMES THE *MAIN EVENT.*

HEH.

THAT'S MY BOY.

...

THANK GOD.

The strength of MONSTERS.

HHRAAAARH!

DAD!

ARE YOU--HRRRGH!--ARE YOU WATCHING, DAD? ARE YOU?

YOU LIKE WHAT YOU SEE, DAD?

BECAUSE YOU'RE NEXT--

NO! YOU'RE NOT MY SON! YOU NEVER WERE!

YEAH? THAT YOUR NEW THEORY?

YOU'RE THE DEVIL'S CHILD! HIS SON!

YOU'RE THE SON OF THE ONE BELOW ALL!

HERE'S YOUR SPECIAL THEORY, DAD. THE ONLY EQUATION YOU NEED:

LOOK AT YOU, TRYING TO FIGURE ME OUT--LEARN THE RULES, FIND THE SECRET--

YOU THINK YOU EVER KNEW WHAT I WAS, OLD MAN?

HULK IS HULK!

WHOOOM

It is all too easy to fall to the Qlippoth.

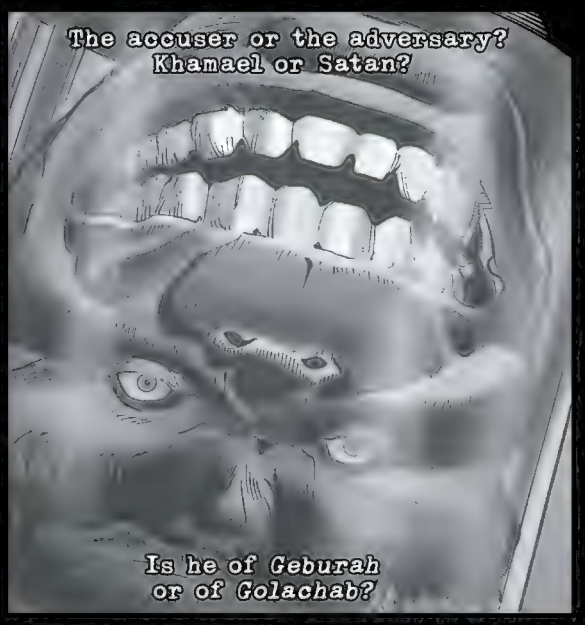
To become a creature of hate.
To use anger only to create pain.
To lose balance.
Geburah is called the left hand of God.
DADDY--
...THAT BOUGHT US MAYBE A MINUTE.
YOU OKAY?
LISTEN, CREEL GAVE ME THE GAMMA BACK. I THINK I CAN CLOSE THE DOOR. BRING US HOME.
BUT IF WE'RE NOT... TOGETHER...
WE WON'T LIVE THROUGH THAT.
GOOD.
TH-THEN LET IT HAPPEN. FINALLY.
JUST LET IT HAPPEN.

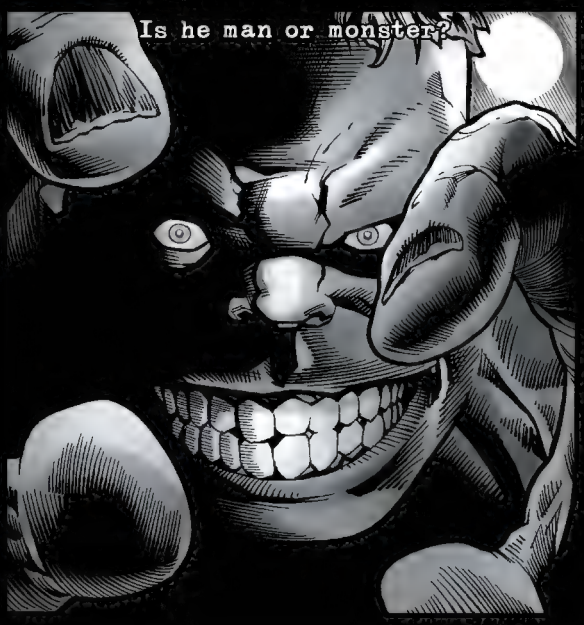
But the right hand is mercy.

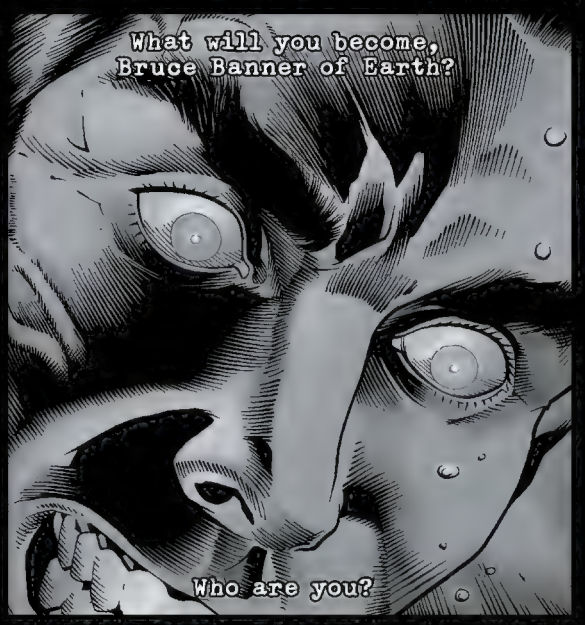
And so I ask again.

What will the Hulk be?

What is the Hulk?



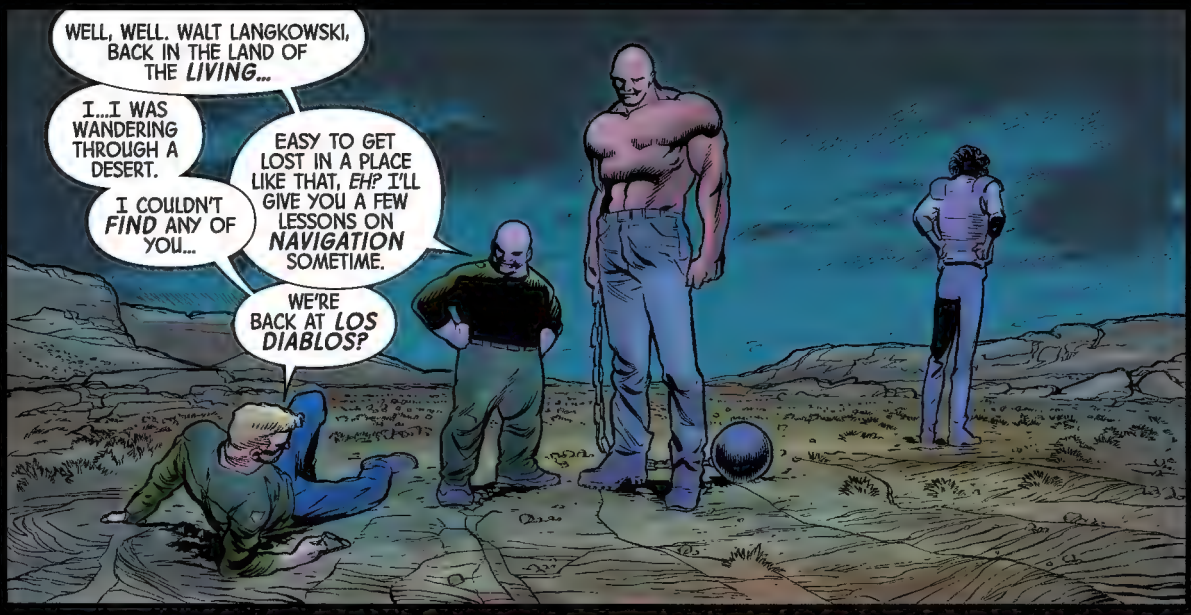



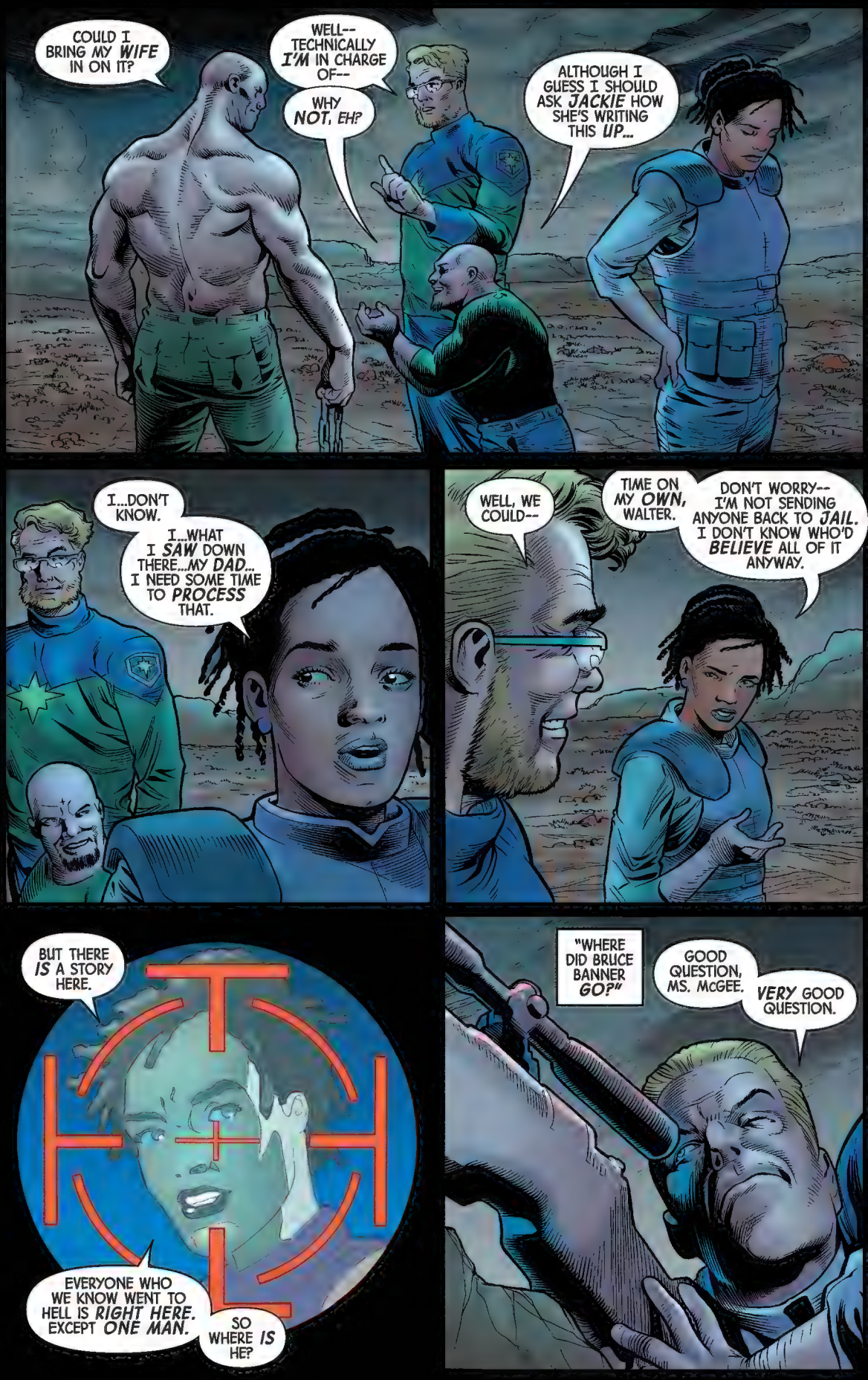




And who am I?

I'll speak to you again.

In due time.




COULD I BRING MY WIFE IN ON IT?
WELL-- TECHNICALLY I'M IN CHARGE OF--
WHY NOT, EH?
ALTHOUGH I GUESS I SHOULD ASK JACKIE HOW SHE'S WRITING THIS UP...
I...DON'T KNOW.
I...WHAT I SAW DOWN THERE...MY DAD... I NEED SOME TIME TO PROCESS THAT.
WELL, WE COULD--
TIME ON MY OWN, WALTER.
DON'T WORRY-- I'M NOT SENDING ANYONE BACK TO JAIL. I DON'T KNOW WHO'D BELIEVE ALL OF IT ANYWAY.
BUT THERE IS A STORY HERE.
EVERYONE WHO WE KNOW WENT TO HELL IS RIGHT HERE. EXCEPT ONE MAN.
SO WHERE IS HE?
"WHERE DID BRUCE BANNER GO?"
GOOD QUESTION, MS. McGEE.
VERY GOOD QUESTION.

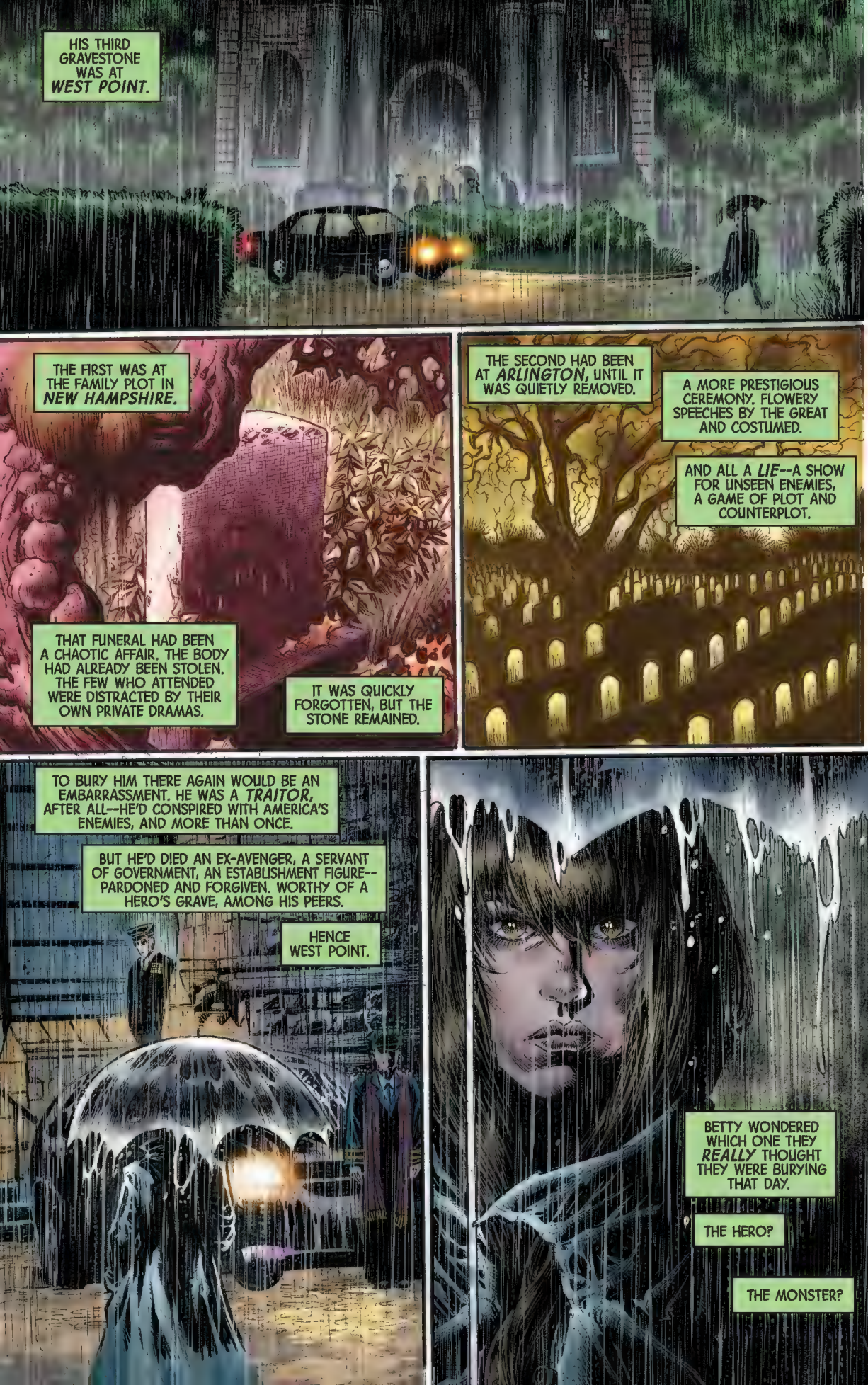
CALIFORNIA.
BRRING
I'M COMING, I'M COMING-- JUST A MOMENT--
BRRING
HELLO?
HELLO? WHO IS THIS?
LOOK, IT'S NEARLY MIDNIGHT--IF YOU DON'T SAY SOMETHING I'M HANGING UP--
BUH- BETTY.
I NUH- NEED...
I NEED TO COME HOME...
...
WHERE ARE YOU CALLING FROM?

# A BOOTH IN THE MIDWEST

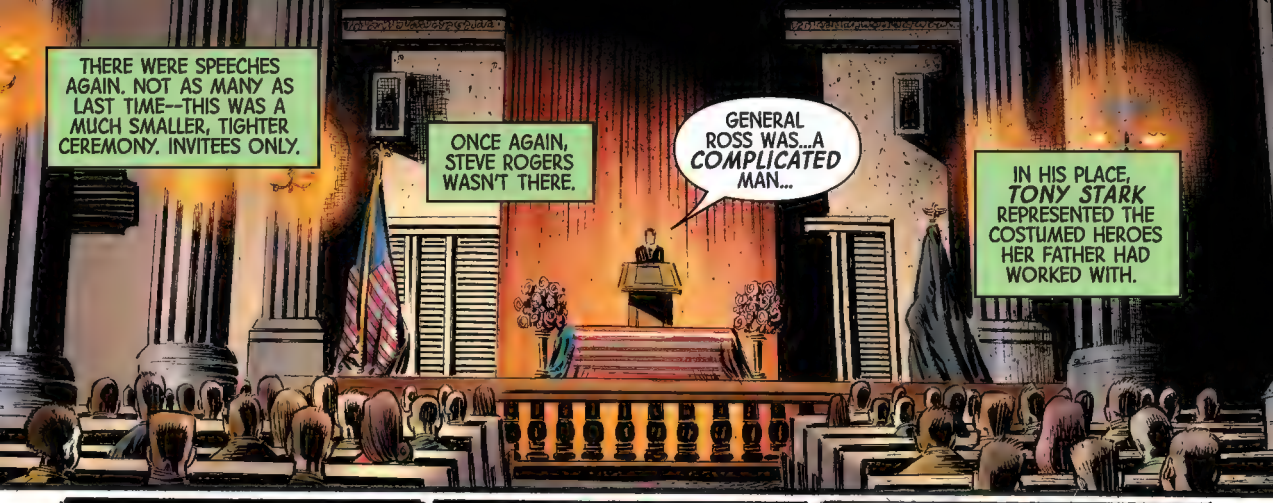
14

“LOVE NEVER DIES
A NATURAL DEATH.”

– ANAÏS NIN
*THE FOUR-CHAMBERED HEART*

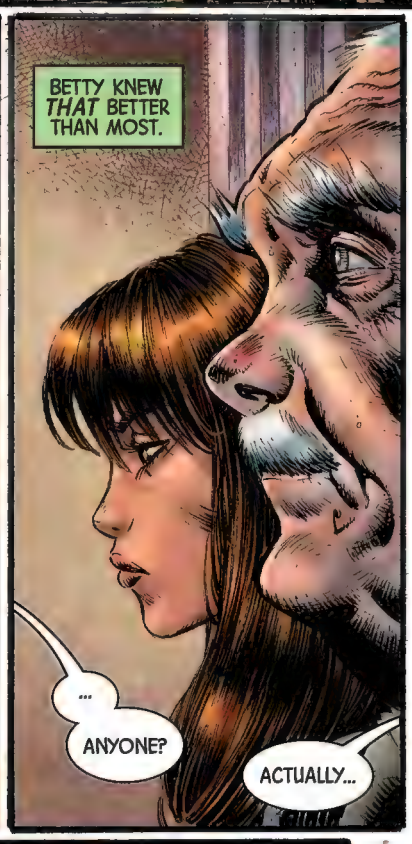

HIS THIRD GRAVESTONE WAS AT *WEST POINT.*
THE FIRST WAS AT THE FAMILY PLOT IN *NEW HAMPSHIRE.*
THAT FUNERAL HAD BEEN A CHAOTIC AFFAIR. THE BODY HAD ALREADY BEEN STOLEN. THE FEW WHO ATTENDED WERE DISTRACTED BY THEIR OWN PRIVATE DRAMAS.
IT WAS QUICKLY FORGOTTEN, BUT THE STONE REMAINED.
THE SECOND HAD BEEN AT *ARLINGTON*, UNTIL IT WAS QUIETLY REMOVED.
A MORE PRESTIGIOUS CEREMONY. FLOWERY SPEECHES BY THE GREAT AND COSTUMED.
AND ALL A *LIE*--A SHOW FOR UNSEEN ENEMIES, A GAME OF PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.
TO BURY HIM THERE AGAIN WOULD BE AN EMBARRASSMENT. HE WAS A *TRAITOR*, AFTER ALL--HE'D CONSPIRED WITH AMERICA'S ENEMIES, AND MORE THAN ONCE.
BUT HE'D DIED AN EX-AVENGER, A SERVANT OF GOVERNMENT, AN ESTABLISHMENT FIGURE--PARDONED AND FORGIVEN. WORTHY OF A HERO'S GRAVE, AMONG HIS PEERS.
HENCE WEST POINT.
BETTY WONDERED WHICH ONE THEY *REALLY* THOUGHT THEY WERE BURYING THAT DAY.
THE HERO?
THE MONSTER?

THADEUS E.
"THUNDERBOLT"
ROSS
LT. GEN. U.S. AIR FORCE
1962-2019
USMA CLASS OF 1983
TO FIGHT THE
UNBEATABLE FOE,
TO REACH THE
UNREACHABLE STAR.
OR WAS HE BOTH?


THERE WERE SPEECHES AGAIN. NOT AS MANY AS LAST TIME--THIS WAS A MUCH SMALLER, TIGHTER CEREMONY. INVITEES ONLY.
ONCE AGAIN, STEVE ROGERS WASN'T THERE.
GENERAL ROSS WAS...A *COMPLICATED* MAN...
IN HIS PLACE, *TONY STARK* REPRESENTED THE COSTUMED HEROES HER FATHER HAD WORKED WITH.

HIS EYES KEPT FLICKING TO THE *COFFIN*, AS IF SOMETHING MIGHT BURST OUT OF IT AT ANY MOMENT.
TWICE BITTEN, THREE TIMES SHY.
...HAD OUR *DIFFERENCES*, BUT HE, AH...WILL BE *REMEMBERED* AS AN AVENGER IN GOOD...

BUT THEN, DEATH WASN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE.
...ALL I HAVE *PREPARED*, I'M AFRAID. WOULD, AH, WOULD ANYONE *ELSE* LIKE TO SPEAK?


BETTY KNEW *THAT* BETTER THAN MOST.
...
ANYONE?
ACTUALLY...

...*I* HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.

REGINALD FORTEAN.
I WORKED WITH THE GENERAL FOR MANY YEARS, BACK AT "PROJECT GREENSKIN"--OR GAMMA BASE, AS IT BECAME KNOWN.
I KNEW HIM WELL.
IN MANY WAYS...
...HE WAS A FATHER TO ME.
GENERAL THADDEUS ROSS TAUGHT ME MANY THINGS.
TO CARRY MYSELF WITH AUTHORITY. TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN MY ABILITIES. TO ASSERT MYSELF WHEN THE WORLD SEEMED AGAINST ME.
AND MOST OF ALL...HE TAUGHT ME TO STAND AGAINST MONSTERS.
THERE CAN BE NO QUARTER WITH THOSE FORCES OF CHAOS THAT WISH TO UPEND THE STATUS QUO.
THERE CAN BE NO HARBORING OF THEM IN OUR HOMES--
--OR IN OUR HEARTS.

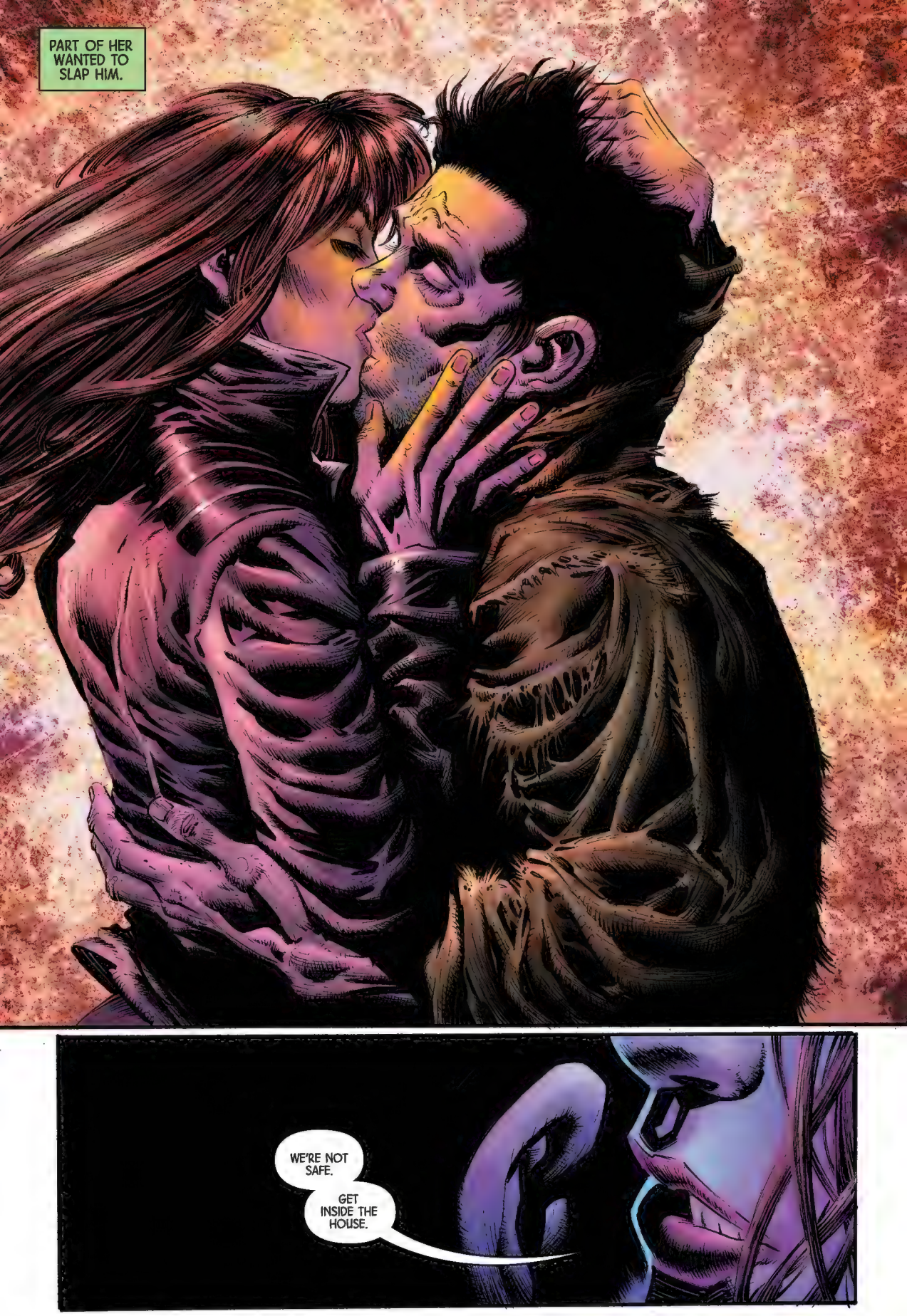
"NO CONSORTING WITH THE ENEMY."
LITTLE PRESENT FROM OUR FRIENDS IN GOVERNMENT.
THE LAST REMAINS OF... WHAT ARE WE CALLING HIM NOW? SUBJECT B?
THE CONTACT SAID WE SHOULDN'T REACH OUT TO HIM AGAIN, THOUGH...
I'M NOT SURPRISED. THAT THING WITH STERNS AND CORTEZ COST US A LOT OF GOODWILL.
BESIDES, THE WHOLE POINT OF SHADOW BASE MOVING TO THE SECONDARY SITES WAS TO SEVER TIES--MAXIMIZE DENIABILITY.
HOW MUCH IS IN THERE?
LOOKS ABOUT A HUNDRED POUNDS.
NOT MUCH...
WELL, APPARENTLY THE REST OF IT IS ORBITING JUPITER AFTER THE LAST ATTEMPT TO REBUILD HIM.
STILL, EVEN THAT MUCH SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO JUMP-START THINGS.
THE HARD PART...WELL, THAT'S WHAT IT ALWAYS IS:
LOOKING AT OURSELVES IN THE MIRROR.
"HAST THOU AN ARM LIKE GOD?"

OR CANST THOU THUNDER WITH A VOICE LIKE HIM?
DECK THYSELF NOW WITH MAJESTY AND EXCELLENCY, AND ARRAY THYSELF WITH GLORY AND BEAUTY.
CAST ABROAD THE RAGE OF THY WRATH, AND BEHOLD EVERY ONE THAT IS PROUD, AND ABASE HIM.
THEY SHOULDN'T DO THAT.
LOOK ON EVERY ONE THAT IS PROUD, AND BRING HIM LOW, AND TREAD DOWN THE WICKED IN THEIR PLACE.
HIDE THEM IN THE DUST TOGETHER, AND BIND THEIR FACES IN SECRET.
THEN WILL I ALSO CONFESS UNTO THEE THAT THINE OWN RIGHT HAND CAN SAVE THEE.
THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE IT OUT IN THE RAIN LIKE THAT.
DOESN'T HE KNOW?
YOU KNOW THAT GUY, BETTY?
...
WE'VE MET.

OOF. CAROL'S GOING TO BE PISSED SHE WASN'T INVITED.
I THINK SHE WANTED TO TALK TO FORTEAN ABOUT...UH...WELL, THAT WHOLE BUSINESS WITH BRUCE...
MM.
BETTY--I KNOW THIS ISN'T THE BEST TIME. BUT... WE'RE ON YOUR SIDE, OKAY?
WHAT HAPPENED IN IOWA WAS A MESS. BUT IF BRUCE HAD JUST KEPT HIS HEAD, WE COULD HAVE WORKED IT OUT.
THE AVENGERS AREN'T THE BAD GUYS HERE.
LOOK--WE'RE ON THE OUTS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OURSELVES RIGHT NOW. WE ONLY WANT WHAT'S BEST.
BRUCE CAN'T RUN FOREVER. NOT EVEN WITH THE HULK ON HIS SIDE.
HE NEEDS TO COME IN.
MM.
CAN I GIVE YOU A RIDE HOME, AT LEAST? I'VE GOT A PLANE AT LAGUARDIA THAT ACTUALLY TURNS INTO A ROBOT.
I CALL IT THE "STARKSCREAM"--
YOU'VE ALSO GOT A FLYING DEATH RAY THAT BLEW UP A TOWN, MR. STARK.
I'LL FLY COACH.

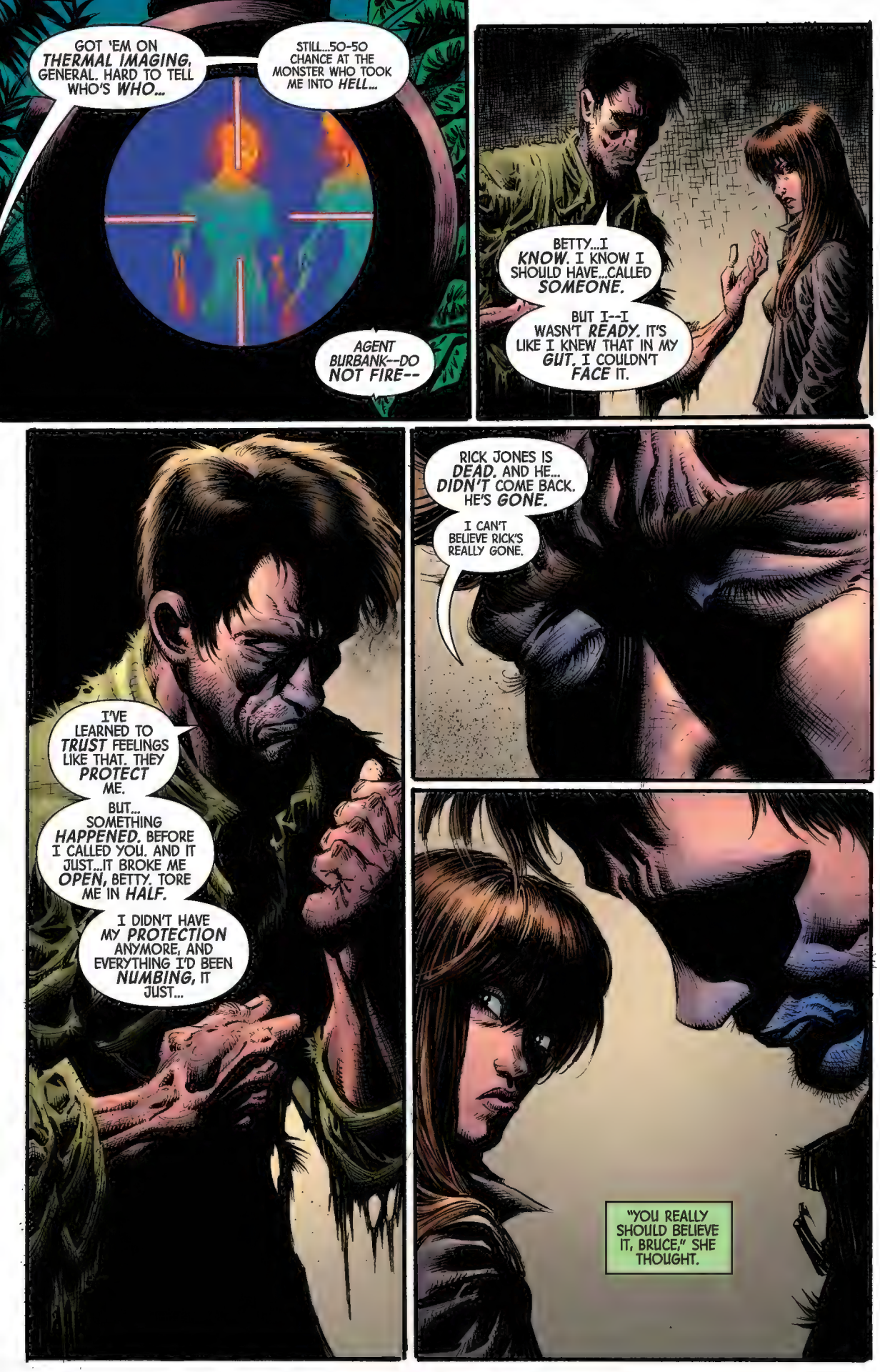
BETTY FLEW COACH.
IT GAVE HER A FEW HOURS TO THINK OVER THE FORTEAN SITUATION. OBVIOUSLY, HE KNEW ABOUT BRUCE'S PHONE CALL.
THERE WEREN'T ANY BUGS IN THE HOUSE--SHE'D CHECKED--AND HER LINE WAS CLEAN. WHICH MEANT HE HAD OTHER METHODS.
THEY'D FOUGHT BACK WHEN SHE WAS "RED SHE-HULK." OBVIOUSLY, HE BORE A GRUDGE.
AND HE'D HAD A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH HER FATHER...
...AND SHE HADN'T. NOT REALLY.
THE LAST TIME SHE EVER SAW HIS FACE WAS THROUGH PRISON GLASS.
HE'D CALL HER SOMETIMES, FROM THE WHITE HOUSE. "COME VISIT BEFORE I'M IN JAIL AGAIN," HE'D SAY.
BUT SHE NEVER DID.
AND NOW HE WAS DEAD.

AND SHE JUST COULDN'T MAKE IT SEEM REAL.
HE'D BEEN DEAD BEFORE, AFTER ALL.
SO HAD SHE.
AND SO HAD HER *HUSBAND.*
BRUCE.
BETTY. I'M...
I'M SORRY ABOUT YOUR FATHER.
AND I'M SORRY IT TOOK SO LONG TO *CALL.*
HE SAID, AS IF THAT MADE IT *OKAY.*
AND SO LONG TO ACTUALLY *GET* HERE! YOU WOULDN'T *BELIEVE* WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH SINCE WE TALKED ON THE--
FOR *MONTHS,* SHE'D THOUGHT HE WAS *DEAD.* REALLY DEAD.
MONTHS OF *SIGHTINGS* AND *FALSE HOPES* AND *GRIEF.*
AND HE'D *LET* HER GO ON THINKING THAT. HE'D *LET HER.*


PART OF HER WANTED TO SLAP HIM.
WE'RE NOT SAFE.
GET INSIDE THE HOUSE.

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS, GENERAL.
I'VE REACHED THE LOCATION THE MONITOR TEAM SPECIFIED--AND I'M IN POSITION--
--BUT THERE'S NO CLEAR SHOT.
PERMISSION TO PUT ONE THROUGH MRS. BANNER'S BACK AND FINISH THIS--
THAT'S A NEGATIVE, AGENT BURBANK.
I THOUGHT FRIENDS OF THE HULK WERE ENEMY COLLABORATORS, GENERAL--
I BURIED HER FATHER TODAY, BURBANK. THAT MAN MEANT A GREAT DEAL TO ME.
I WON'T SEND HIS DAUGHTER TO JOIN HIM UNLESS I HAVE TO.
YOU WEREN'T THERE--YOU DIDN'T SEE WHERE THAT MONSTER TOOK US--
SUBJECT ELIZABETH ROSS BANNER 1753403 PDT
REQUEST DENIED, I SAID.
MONITOR FIVE--SYNC TO MY SCREEN. I WANT TO SEE AND HEAR EVERYTHING.
MONITOR FIVE?
GENERAL-- WE--
WE HAVE A PROBLEM--
BETTY HAD TAKEN PRECAUTIONS.

SHE ALREADY HAD ONE OF HER OLD UNIFORMS ON, UNDER HER CLOTHES. THEY WERE BULLET-PROOF--IT SEEMED PRACTICAL.
AND SHE'D SIGNALED A FRIEND TO COME OVER. BRUCE WOULDN'T TAKE IT WELL, SHE KNEW, BUT THERE WAS SAFETY IN NUMBERS.
FINALLY, SHE'D ACTIVATED THE STATUE.
IT'S CONSECRATED TO IKONN--BLOCKS ALL PSYCHICS AND REMOTE VIEWERS.
A LITTLE LEFTOVER FROM MY TIME WITH THE ORDER OF THE SHIELD. I SAVE IT FOR WHEN I NEED IT.
THAT'S THAT SECRET SOCIETY YOU RUN WITH, ISN'T IT?
THE ONES WHO ORDERED MY DEATH...
RAN. PAST TENSE. THE ORDER DOESN'T RETURN MY CALLS NOW THAT I'M ONLY HUMAN.
AND YOU MANAGED TO PLAN YOUR OWN DEATH WITHOUT ANY HELP. ONLY IT DIDN'T TAKE, DID IT?
BETTY...
I CRIED OVER YOU, BRUCE.
I DIDN'T CRY OVER MY FATHER, BUT I CRIED OVER YOU.
I WONDER--WAS THAT BECAUSE I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD?
OR BECAUSE I KNEW YOU WERE ALIVE?


GOT 'EM ON THERMAL IMAGING, GENERAL. HARD TO TELL WHO'S WHO...
STILL...50-50 CHANCE AT THE MONSTER WHO TOOK ME INTO HELL...
AGENT BURBANK--DO NOT FIRE--
BETTY...I KNOW. I KNOW I SHOULD HAVE...CALLED SOMEONE.
BUT I--I WASN'T READY. IT'S LIKE I KNEW THAT IN MY GUT. I COULDN'T FACE IT.
I'VE LEARNED TO TRUST FEELINGS LIKE THAT. THEY PROTECT ME.
BUT... SOMETHING HAPPENED. BEFORE I CALLED YOU. AND IT JUST...IT BROKE ME OPEN, BETTY. TORE ME IN HALF.
I DIDN'T HAVE MY PROTECTION ANYMORE, AND EVERYTHING I'D BEEN NUMBING, IT JUST...
RICK JONES IS DEAD. AND HE... DIDN'T COME BACK. HE'S GONE.
I CAN'T BELIEVE RICK'S REALLY GONE.
"YOU REALLY SHOULD BELIEVE IT, BRUCE," SHE THOUGHT.

"BECAUSE THE HULK MET UP WITH THE SCUM WHO *KILLED* HIM...AND JOINED THEIR *TEAM.*
"WANT TO TELL ME WHAT *THAT* WAS ABOUT?"

BUT SHE ONLY THOUGHT IT.
MM.
HE'D *CHEATED* ON HER. BROKEN HER HEART, AND HER LIFE, A DOZEN WAYS. AND WHEN SHE'D BECOME HIS *EQUAL*--THE *RED* SHE-HULK--

--HE'D TAKEN *THAT* AWAY TOO. "FOR HER OWN GOOD."
HIM *AND* RICK. EVEN THAT WAS TAINTED.

IP DIP DOO.
CAT'S GOT THE FLU.
BUT STILL... THERE HE STOOD.

AN OPEN WOUND IN THE SHAPE OF A MAN.
DOG'S GOT THE CHICKEN POX.
A BEATEN DOG. AND SHE JUST COULDN'T DO IT. SHE COULD NEVER DO IT.
NEVER HURT HIM.
EVEN WITH THE TRUTH.
AGENT BURBANK! STAND DOWN NOW! THAT IS AN ORDER!
THE SUN'S GONE DOWN--
HER FATHER HAD CALLED HIM A "MILKSOP."
SHE'D LOVED THAT VULNERABILITY...
...BUT NOW IT SEEMED, SOMEHOW, AS MANAGED AS THE RAGE THAT SMASHED CITIES AND LEFT NO BODY COUNT.
BETTY... I REALLY AM SO SORRY.
AS CAREFULLY CALCULATED.
SO OUT
GOES
YOU.
IN THAT MOMENT, SHE KNEW WHY HER FATHER HAD HATED HIM.

AND IN THAT ONE MOMENT, SHE HATED HIM MORE.
BRUCE... I'M SORRY.
BUT I
SKLUTCH
WHOOPS.
GENERAL?

I HIT THE WRONG ONE.
I CAN TAKE HIM. IT'LL BE A *RUSH*.
SWAPPING OUT FOR THE *THOUSAND CAL*.
STAND BY.
HRRAARGH!
YEAH, YEAH...
B-KOOM

COME ON! I CAN TAKE YOU, YOU GREEN FREAK! IT'LL BE A RUSH!
YOU'RE GOING BACK TO HELL TONIGHT!
REMEMBER THE PROTOCOL!
STUN AND RUN!
I CAN TAKE HIM--
IT'S NIGHT, YOU DAMNED FOOL!
WERE YOU ASLEEP DURING RETRAINING?
UNLESS THE SUN'S UP--HE DOESN'T DIE!

NONE OF THEM DIE!
RRR.

I CAN TAKE HIM.
IT'LL BE A RUSH.
HHRRRRHH...
IT'LL BE A--
AT EASE, SOLDIER.
I'VE GOT IT FROM HERE.
WHAM
RRRRRHH...
BETTY CALLED, BRUCE. SHE SAID YOU MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE.
NOW, YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY HAD A SETBACK, BUT IF YOU CAN TRY TO STAY CALM, WE'LL ALL GET THROUGH THIS.
TRUST ME...

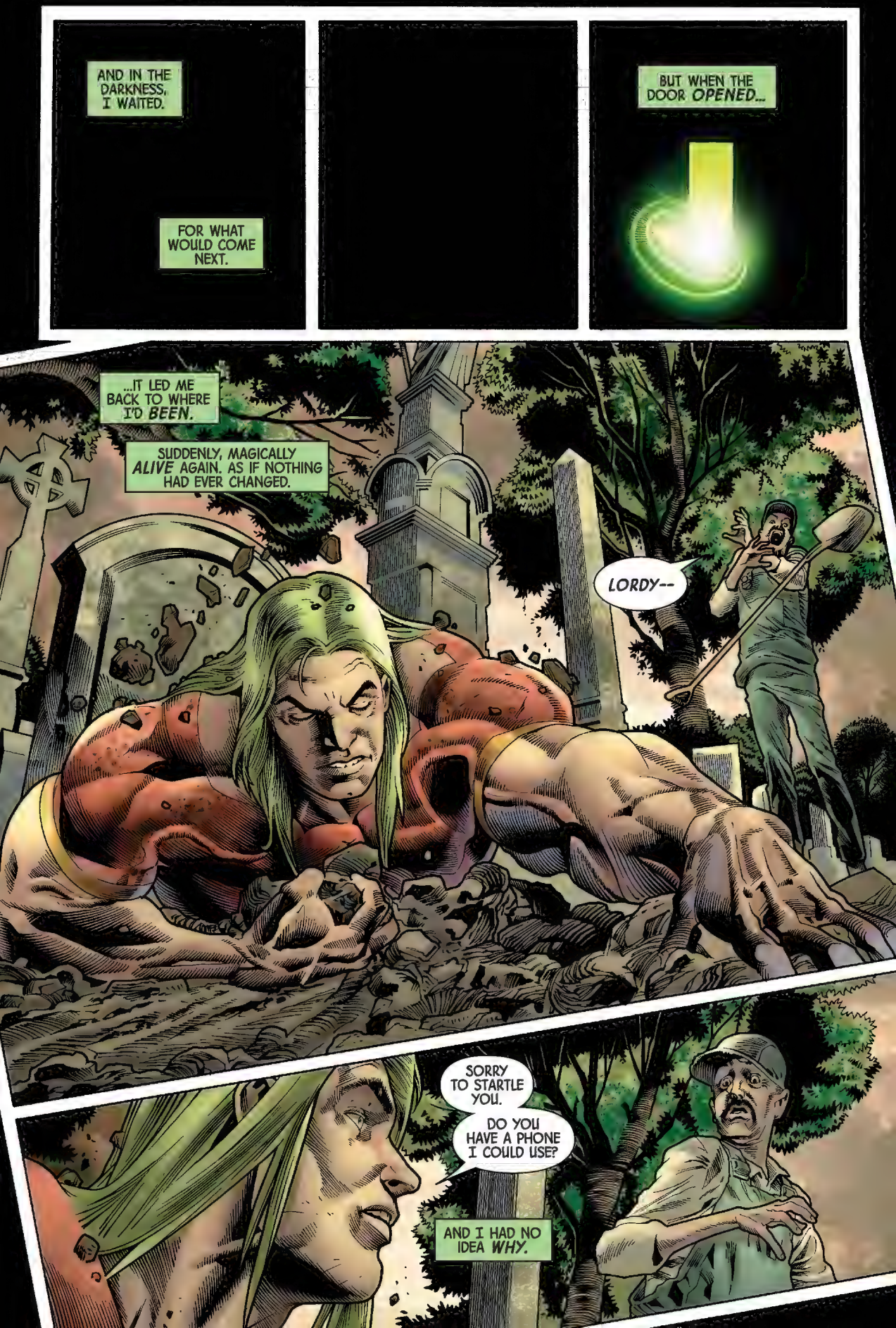
# WE ONLY MEET AT FUNERALS

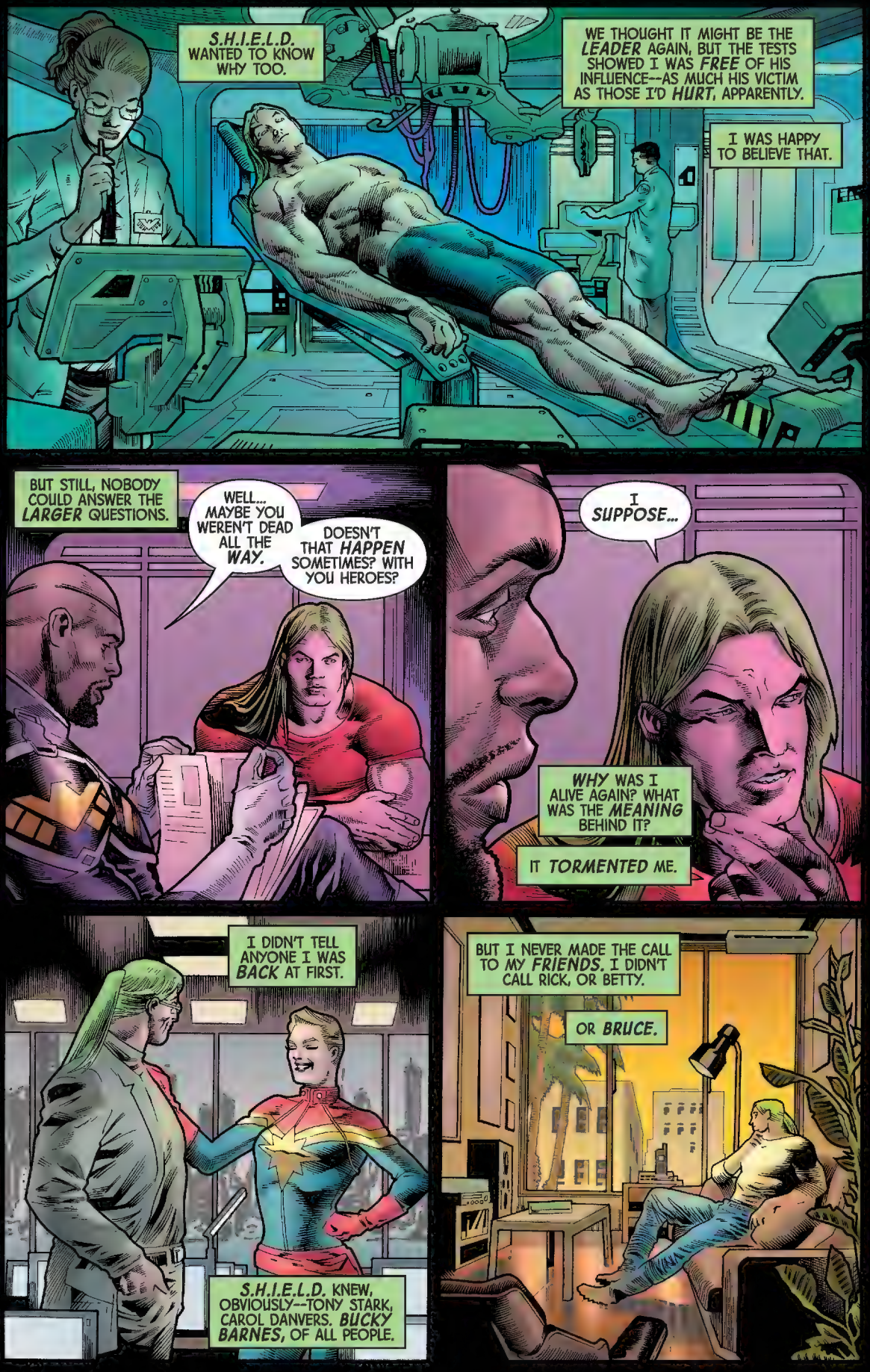
15

"YOU WILL NEVER LIVE IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE."

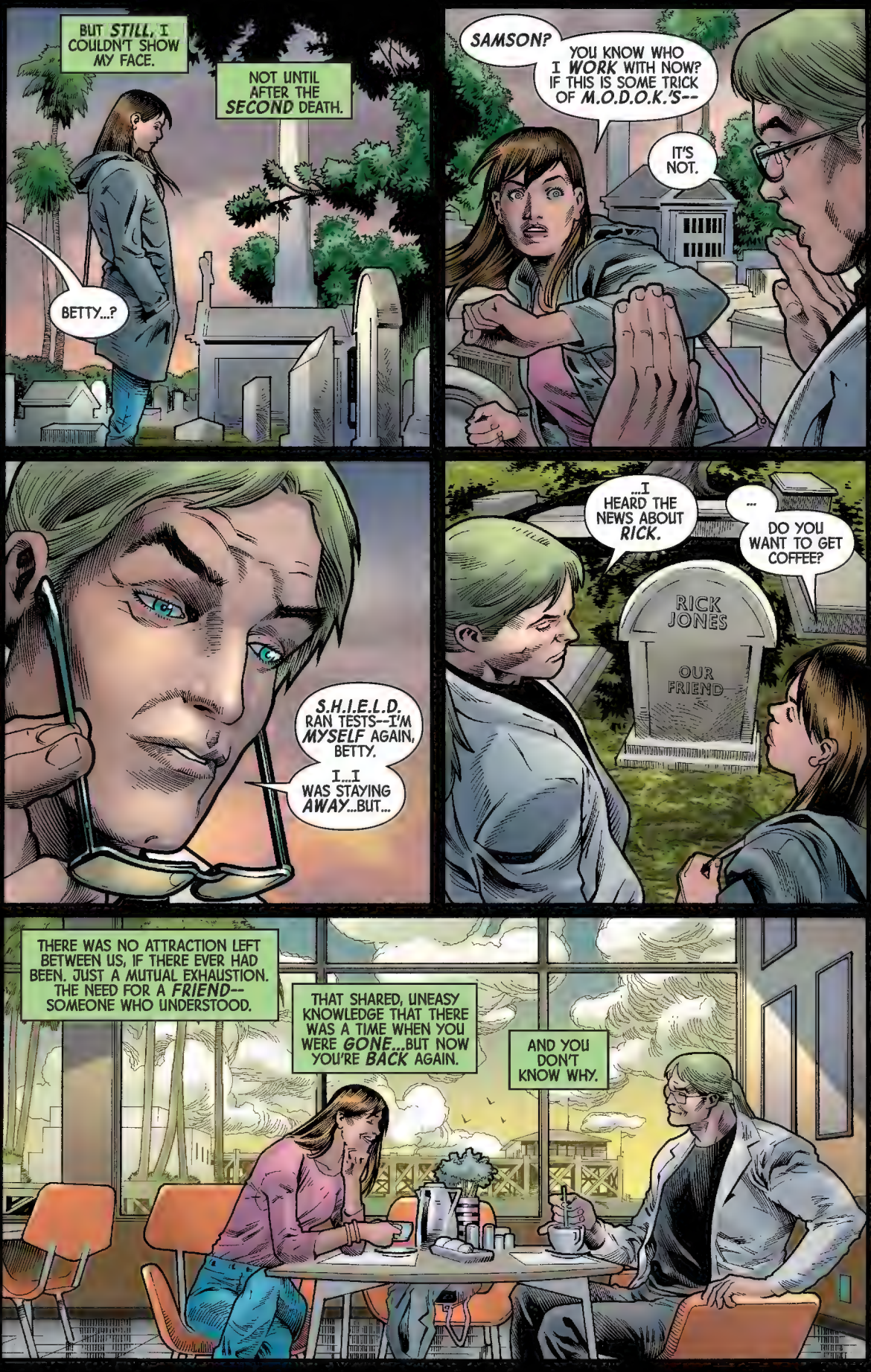
– ALBERT CAMUS
"INTUITIONS"

DYING WAS A SIMPLE, PERFECT MOMENT.
M.O.D.O.K. AND THE LEADER HAD SPLIT MY PERSONALITY INTO WARRING FACTIONS, BRINGING OUT MY DARKEST IMPULSES.
UNDER THEIR CONTROL, I'D BETRAYED, MANIPULATED, EVEN MURDERED MY OLDEST FRIENDS.
BUT WHEN THE END CAME, I PLAYED THE HERO ONE MORE TIME. DOC SAMSON SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM EVIL.
BRUCE. ONE LAST THING. FROM YOUR DOC.
I BELIEVE IN YOU...
UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, I DIED THE BEST DEATH I COULD.
I EVEN GOT AN EPILOGUE. A DREAMLIKE FINAL ADVENTURE AGAINST THE KING OF CHAOS FOR THE FATE OF THE WORLD.
A TRIUMPHANT FAREWELL BEFORE THE DARKNESS.


AND IN THE DARKNESS, I WAITED.
FOR WHAT WOULD COME NEXT.
BUT WHEN THE DOOR OPENED...
...IT LED ME BACK TO WHERE I'D BEEN.
SUDDENLY, MAGICALLY ALIVE AGAIN. AS IF NOTHING HAD EVER CHANGED.
LORDY--
SORRY TO STARTLE YOU.
DO YOU HAVE A PHONE I COULD USE?
AND I HAD NO IDEA WHY.


S.H.I.E.L.D. WANTED TO KNOW WHY TOO.
WE THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE THE LEADER AGAIN, BUT THE TESTS SHOWED I WAS FREE OF HIS INFLUENCE--AS MUCH HIS VICTIM AS THOSE I'D HURT, APPARENTLY.
I WAS HAPPY TO BELIEVE THAT.
BUT STILL, NOBODY COULD ANSWER THE LARGER QUESTIONS.
WELL... MAYBE YOU WEREN'T DEAD ALL THE WAY.
DOESN'T THAT HAPPEN SOMETIMES? WITH YOU HEROES?
I SUPPOSE...
WHY WAS I ALIVE AGAIN? WHAT WAS THE MEANING BEHIND IT?
IT TORMENTED ME.
I DIDN'T TELL ANYONE I WAS BACK AT FIRST.
S.H.I.E.L.D. KNEW, OBVIOUSLY--TONY STARK, CAROL DANVERS. BUCKY BARNES, OF ALL PEOPLE.
BUT I NEVER MADE THE CALL TO MY FRIENDS. I DIDN'T CALL RICK, OR BETTY.
OR BRUCE.

HE WAS IN A FRAGILE PLACE.
AMADEUS CHO HAD DRAINED BRUCE'S GAMMA ENERGY--CURING HIM. HE BECAME THE HULK IN BRUCE'S PLACE.
BRUCE'S REACTION HAD BEEN...STRANGE. TONY SAID HE SEEMED FINE, BUT...
...I DEBATED GOING TO SEE HIM. CONFRONTING HIM THE WAY NOBODY ELSE WANTED TO.
BUT I REMEMBERED MY JUNG. THE ANALYST'S HANDS MUST BE AS CLEAN AS THE SURGEON'S. THE DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP IS A MUTUAL JOURNEY, WHERE EACH AFFECTS THE OTHER...
...AND WHAT WAS I NOW? NOT A HEALER. A DEAD MAN.
GROPING THROUGH A WORLD SUDDENLY WITHOUT LIGHT, SEARCHING FOR A SINGLE FLICKERING FLAME...
LEONARD COHEN SONGS OF LOVE AND HATE
TO APPROACH MY MOST VOLATILE PATIENT WHILE I WAS SO UNSURE OF MYSELF? OF EVERYTHING?
IT WAS UNTHINKABLE.
WE INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM FOR SOME BREAKING NEWS--
AND THEN IT WAS TOO LATE.


BUT STILL, I COULDN'T SHOW MY FACE.
NOT UNTIL AFTER THE SECOND DEATH.
BETTY...?
SAMSON?
YOU KNOW WHO I WORK WITH NOW? IF THIS IS SOME TRICK OF M.O.D.O.K.'S--
IT'S NOT.
S.H.I.E.L.D. RAN TESTS--I'M MYSELF AGAIN, BETTY.
I...I WAS STAYING AWAY...BUT...
...I HEARD THE NEWS ABOUT RICK.
...
DO YOU WANT TO GET COFFEE?
RICK JONES
OUR FRIEND
THERE WAS NO ATTRACTION LEFT BETWEEN US, IF THERE EVER HAD BEEN. JUST A MUTUAL EXHAUSTION. THE NEED FOR A FRIEND-- SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTOOD.
THAT SHARED, UNEASY KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE WAS A TIME WHEN YOU WERE GONE...BUT NOW YOU'RE BACK AGAIN.
AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHY.

WHEN THE *HULK SIGHTINGS* BEGAN, BETTY WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT.

NOT SO MUCH THAT BRUCE WAS *ALIVE*-- BUT THAT HE WOULDN'T *CALL*.

THAT HE'D CHOOSE TO *HIDE* FROM HER.

PTOO

BUT I KNEW HOW *EASY* IT WAS TO HIDE. I BELIEVED.

ALL RIGHT, BRUCE...

I *WANTED* TO BELIEVE.

*HE'LL KNOW*, I THOUGHT. *IF ANYONE WILL, HE WILL.*

*HE'LL KNOW WHY WE'RE ALL STILL HERE.*

...LET'S REASON THIS *OUT*, SHALL WE?

HOOOU

YOU KNOW, THERE'S AN *IRONY* HERE. I'M TRYING TO REACH YOUR *MIND*--
UUHHR
--BUT IT HAS TO *GROW BACK* FIRST, DOESN'T IT?
WHATEVER THAT *CYBORG ASSASSIN* SHOT YOU WITH--
"--AND I NOTICE HE HASN'T STUCK AROUND TO *THANK* ME FOR SAVING HIS *LIFE*--"
THIS IS *AGENT BURBANK* CALLING *SHADOW BASE.*
GET ME THE HELL *OUT* OF HERE!
--IT'S MADE THE *THERAPEUTIC APPROACH* SOMEWHAT...

...IRRELEVANT!
SMMAAAHH!
"SMASH."
THE WORD IS "SMASH."
YOU'RE THE HULK, AND YOU SMASH. TRY TO REMEMBER.
THEN MAYBE YOU'LL REMEMBER I'M ON YOUR--
--SIDE--
SMMAASSH!

HULK!
SMASH!
SAMSON.
LEONARD SAMSON. YOU KNOW ME. I'M YOUR THERAPIST.
SMASH GREEN-HAIR--
AND YOU'RE ACTING OUT, HULK!
YOU'RE SMARTER THAN THIS!
SAMMMM... SONNN...?

B-BETTY... THE...THE PLASTIC MAN...
HE...HURT BETTY...
WHAT?
H-HULK... HULK HAS TO...
THAT'S IT. REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE. WHERE YOU ARE.
BETTY'S PLACE.
WHERE'S BETTY, HULK?
HULK HAS TO GO BACK IN NOW.
HULK-- TELL ME.
TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED, OR SO HELP ME--
SHE GOT SHOT, IS WHAT HAPPENED.
THROUGH THE HEAD-- SNIPER FIRE FROM YOUR "CYBORG." THE ONE YOU STOPPED ME FROM TAKING APART.
HAPPY?
BETTY'S DEAD?

...
BETTY'S NOT DEAD?
SHE'S NOT HERE.
MY GUESS IS SHE WENT THAT WAY WHILE WE WERE BUSY.
I KNEW BANNER SEEING HER WAS A BAD IDEA...
WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM THESE DAYS? I HEAR STORIES...
WE DON'T TALK. NOT IN WORDS.
YOU KNOW HOW CRAZY BANNER'S LIFE WAS, SAMSON.
AND IT GOT WORSE WHILE YOU WERE GONE.
NOBODY SAW--NOBODY WANTED TO-- BUT HE WAS SO BROKEN, HE SET UP HIS OWN MURDER.
"AND ALL THAT DID WAS BREAK HIM MORE.
"THERE WAS A HULK THAT CAME OUT TO WORK FOR HYDRA, YOU KNOW THAT? JUST A BIG BALL OF RAGE AND NOTHING ELSE. A WORDLESS THING THAT DIDN'T CARE WHO IT HURT.
"THAT DIDN'T SEE PEOPLE AT ALL..."

DEAR GOD...
YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE, RIGHT?
RELAX. I TOOK CARE OF IT.
THAT THING'S IN PIECES. LOCKED AWAY WHERE I USED TO BE.
LONG AS I'M AROUND, HE'S NEVER GETTING OUT.
FIRST THING I DID WHEN BANNER LET ME LOOSE. SOMEBODY HAD TO TAKE CHARGE...
AND THAT'S YOU?
WHICH HULK ARE YOU?
...
HE NEEDED A DAD. OR SOMETHING... SOMETHING LIKE A DAD.
LIKE A DAD WHO LOVED HIM.
BUT HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT LOVE WAS.
I CAN'T BE OUT IN THE DAY. I DON'T COME OUT, UNLESS I HAVE TO.
UNLESS SOMEBODY HURTS HIM.
AND THEN I TAKE IT PERSONAL.

WHAT IS THIS, ANYWAY? A COUCH SESSION?
MAYBE. THIS TALK ABOUT BEING "LET LOOSE" AND "LOCKED AWAY"...
BRUCE MENTIONED A PERSONA LIKE THAT ONCE. A HULK HE HAD TO ACTIVELY LOCK AWAY IN HIS MIND.
A "DEVIL HULK."
"A DEMONIC, SATANIC PERSONALITY THAT HE KEPT CAGED INSIDE HIM. BRUCE AT HIS ANGRIEST, HIS MOST INHUMAN, HIS MOST MERCILESS.
MY DARLING LITTLE BOY. BREAK MY CHAINS, DARLING BOY.
SET ME FREE AND I WILL DESTROY IT ALL, AND ALL FOR YOU...
"A HULK WHO, IF HE EVER GOT OUT...WOULD BE THE END OF THE WORLD."
TONY STARK TOLD ME ABOUT WHEN YOU FOUGHT HIM. THE NAME YOU RESPONDED TO.
ARE YOU THE DEVIL HULK?
WHAT, YOU ONLY JUST FIGURED THAT OUT?
COME ON IF YOU'RE COMING. WE GOT SOMEWHERE TO BE.

...YOU'RE A SHRINK, SAMSON. YOU KNOW ABOUT PROJECTION.
DEEP DOWN INSIDE, HE'S STILL THAT KID. A LITTLE KID WHO CAN'T IMAGINE LOVE WITHOUT PAIN.
HE GOT SCARED OF ME. WHAT I WAS, WHAT I BROUGHT OUT OF HIM. FIGURED HE COULDN'T LISTEN TO ME.
SUDDENLY, I'M A BIG SNAKE GUY AND EVERYTHING I SAY COMES OUT CREEPY.
I BLAME SUNDAY SCHOOL.
WELL... I'VE STILL GOT QUESTIONS, HULK. THERE ARE THINGS I NEED TO KNOW.
BUT I AM GLAD YOU'RE NOT HERE TO END THE WORLD--
HNH. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M HERE TO DO, SAMSON.
THE HUMAN WORLD NEEDS TO GO.

LET'S START WITH THE *NUKES.*

THE PRESIDENT CAN END *ALL LIFE* IN *MINUTES*--AND THE WHOLE SYSTEM'S DESIGNED TO MAKE IT *THAT EASY.* CAN'T HAVE ANYTHING GET IN THE WAY OF *ARMAGEDDON,* RIGHT?

YOU KNOW HOW *CLOSE* WE'VE COME OVER A *RADAR GLITCH?* 'CAUSE THOSE DAYS ARE *BACK.* CHECK YOUR *PHONE*--MAYBE IT'S HAPPENING *NOW.*

OR MAYBE IT WON'T EVEN *MATTER.* THE PLANET'S *ALREADY* BOILING TO DEATH--WILDFIRES, HURRICANES, WHOLE CHUNKS OF THE FOOD CHAIN *DYING OFF.*

EVERY TIME YOU HEAR ABOUT IT--IT'S *WORSE.* LESS TIME, LESS *HOPE,* BUT THE HUMANS IN *CHARGE* PRETEND THEY DON'T EVEN *BELIEVE* IT.

BECAUSE IF THEY *DID,* IT'D MEAN THEY'D BEEN *WRONG.* AND HUMANS ARE TOO WEAK TO *EVER* ADMIT THAT. TOO *PUNY.*

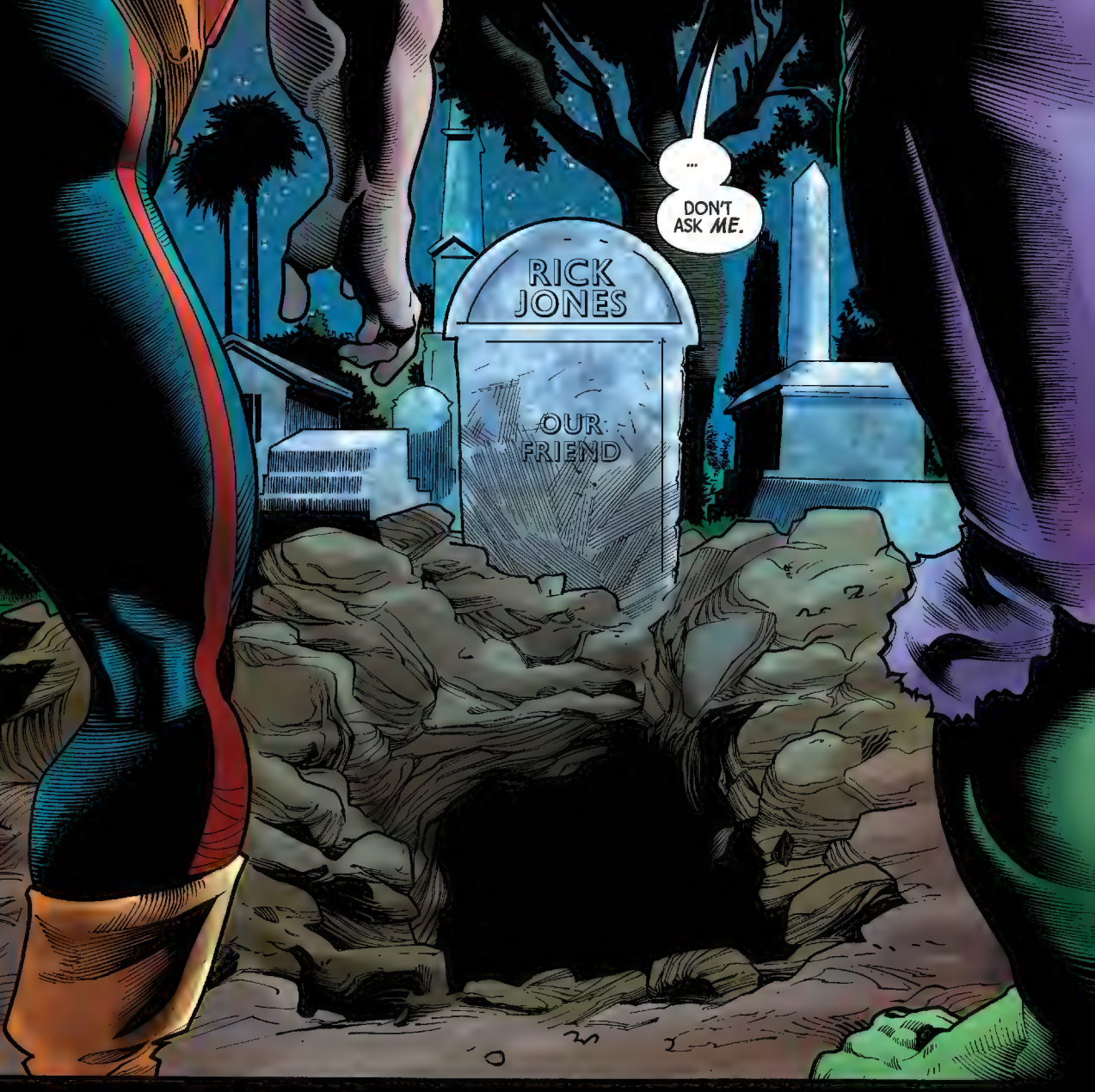
YOU WONDER WHY I'M *ANGRY?*

YOU WANT TO KNOW *WHY* I WANT TO END THE HUMAN WORLD, SAMSON?

BECAUSE IF *I* DO IT, MAYBE SOME OF 'EM WILL *LIVE.*

OOF.
SO... ESSENTIALLY, WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS...
...YOU'RE THE GREEN HULK.
... YOU THINK THIS IS FUNNY?
I THINK SEEING A LARGER PICTURE IS A STEP FORWARD FOR YOU. BUT I'M STILL CONCERNED ABOUT HOW YOU'RE--
SHUT UP, SAMSON.
WE'VE ARRIVED.
HERE? BUT...THIS IS WHERE...
...YOU THINK BETTY'S COME HERE?
SEVERIN MEMORIAL CEMETERY
WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT BETTY? WE'RE NOT LOOKING FOR BETTY, SAMSON.
SHE SHRUGS OFF A BULLET THROUGH THE BRAIN, SHE CAN TAKE CARE OF HERSELF.
WHAT? HULK, WE DON'T KNOW THAT--

WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF SHE'S ALIVE--
I DO.
AND SO DO YOU. THINK ABOUT IT.
BANNER WATCHED YOU DIE-- BUT HERE YOU ARE, LARGE AS LIFE.
YOU'RE PART OF THE CLUB, SAMSON. JUST LIKE BETTY.
YOU, AND HER, AND ME...
...AND HIM.
OH.
SO...WHY DOES THIS KEEP HAPPENING TO US, HULK?
WHY ARE WE ALL STILL HERE?




# THE HOLY OR THE BROKEN

16

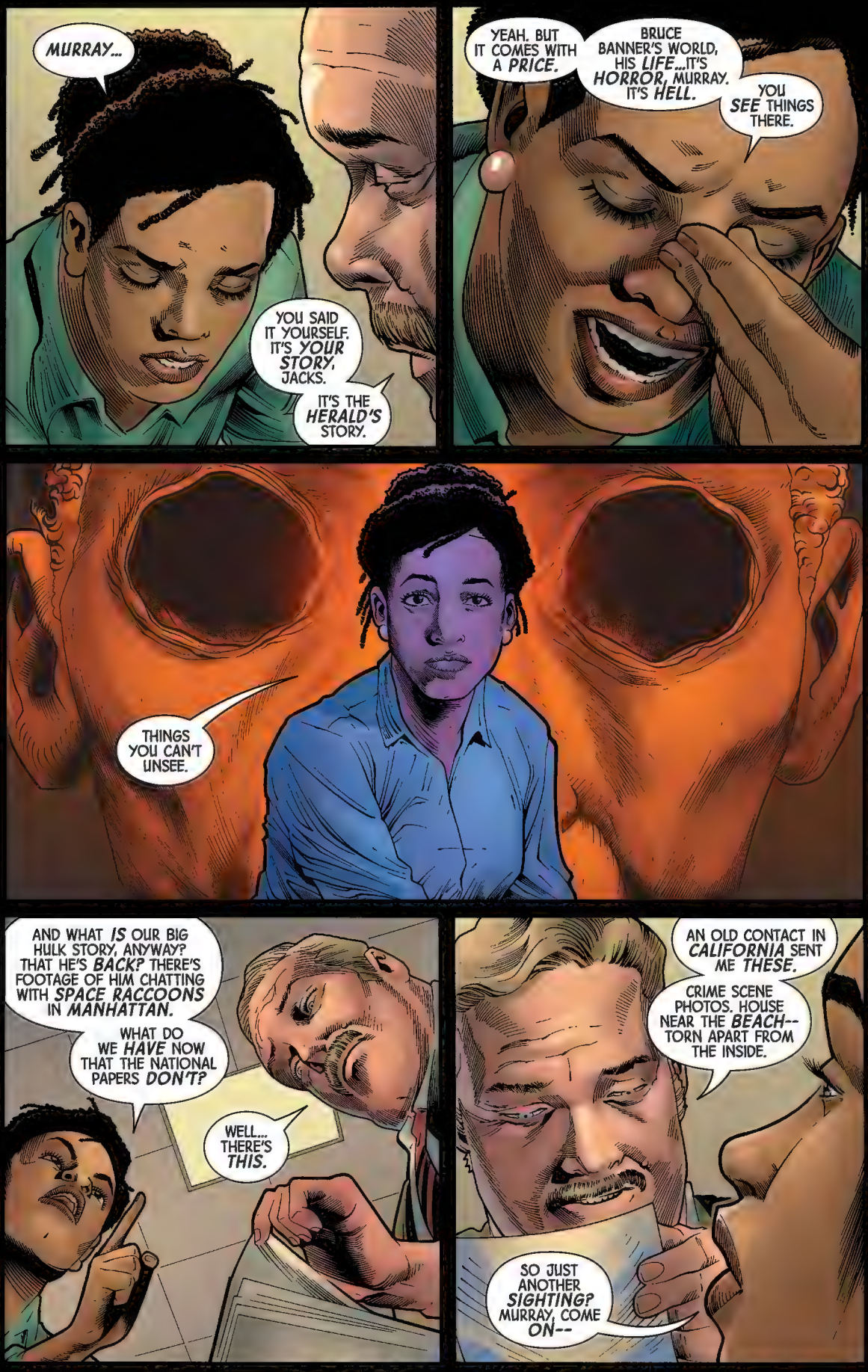
“THIS PLACE IS NOT A PLACE OF HONOR. NO HIGHLY ESTEEMED DEED IS COMMEMORATED HERE. NOTHING VALUED IS HERE. WHAT IS HERE IS DANGEROUS AND REPULSIVE TO US. THIS MESSAGE IS A WARNING ABOUT DANGER.”

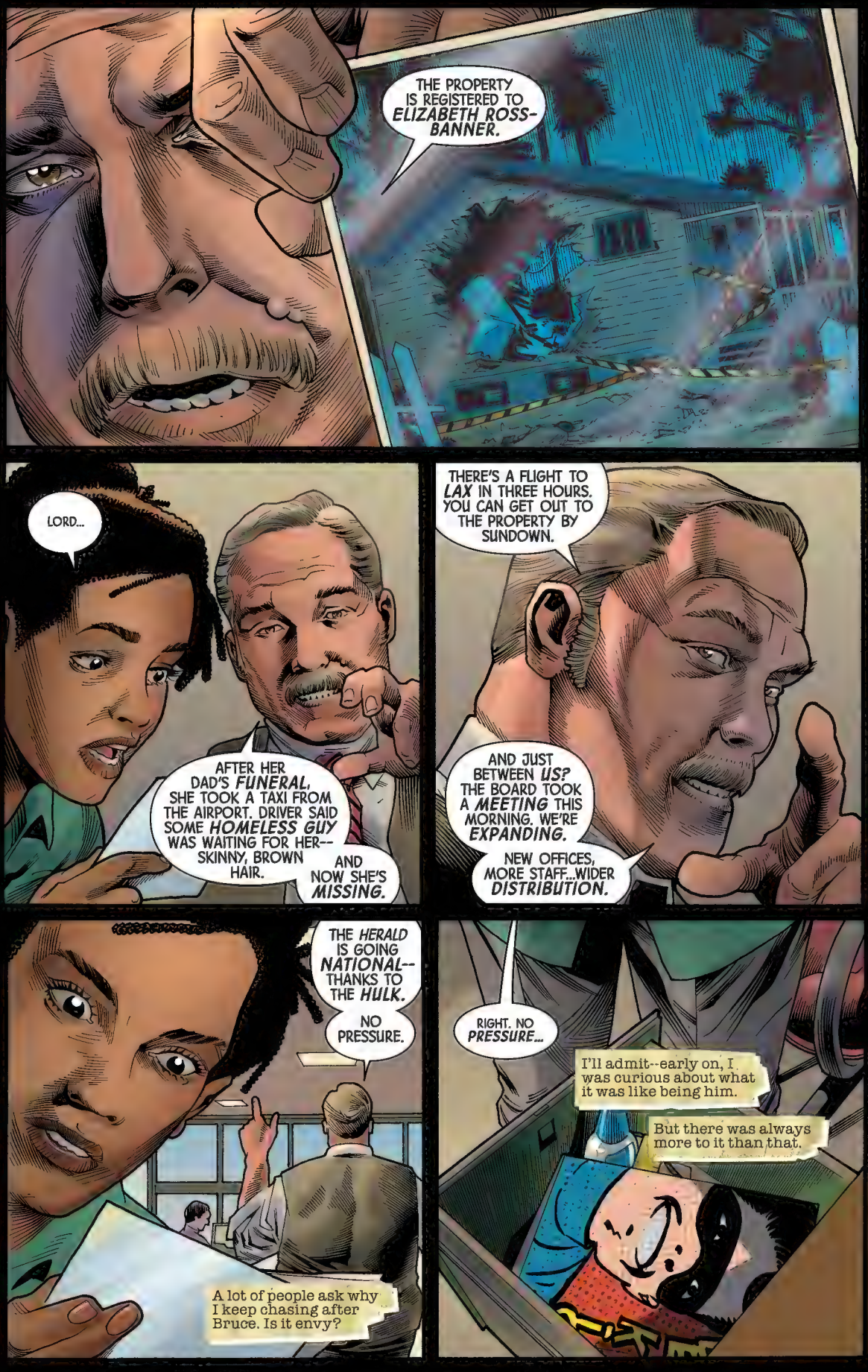
– U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

He asked what was happening. Then he made a kind of strangling sound, like his throat was compressed.
And the change began.
Any time I remember that day or that night, it's with years of hindsight on top. But in that moment, I thought he was already dead.
His skin turned gray, all over, like a corpse. Every part of his body ballooned up like it was about to burst. I heard the cracking noise of his bones stretching.
Who could live through that? He had to be dead--and it was all my fault.
I remember praying--praying like I never had before--for him to live. "Please, God." Over and over.
"Please don't let Doc Banner die."

SHADOW BASE SITE B.
LOCATION UNKNOWN.
Funny how things work out.
I was just a kid. I hadn't even lived yet.
I didn't know where my life was going to lead me.
And I didn't know there were worse things than dying.
Back then, it was all strange and new. I didn't know what I was seeing.
How do I describe what I saw?
The Doc's face was *gone*.
There was something else there. Something that wasn't human--that didn't *want* to be human.
Something angry.

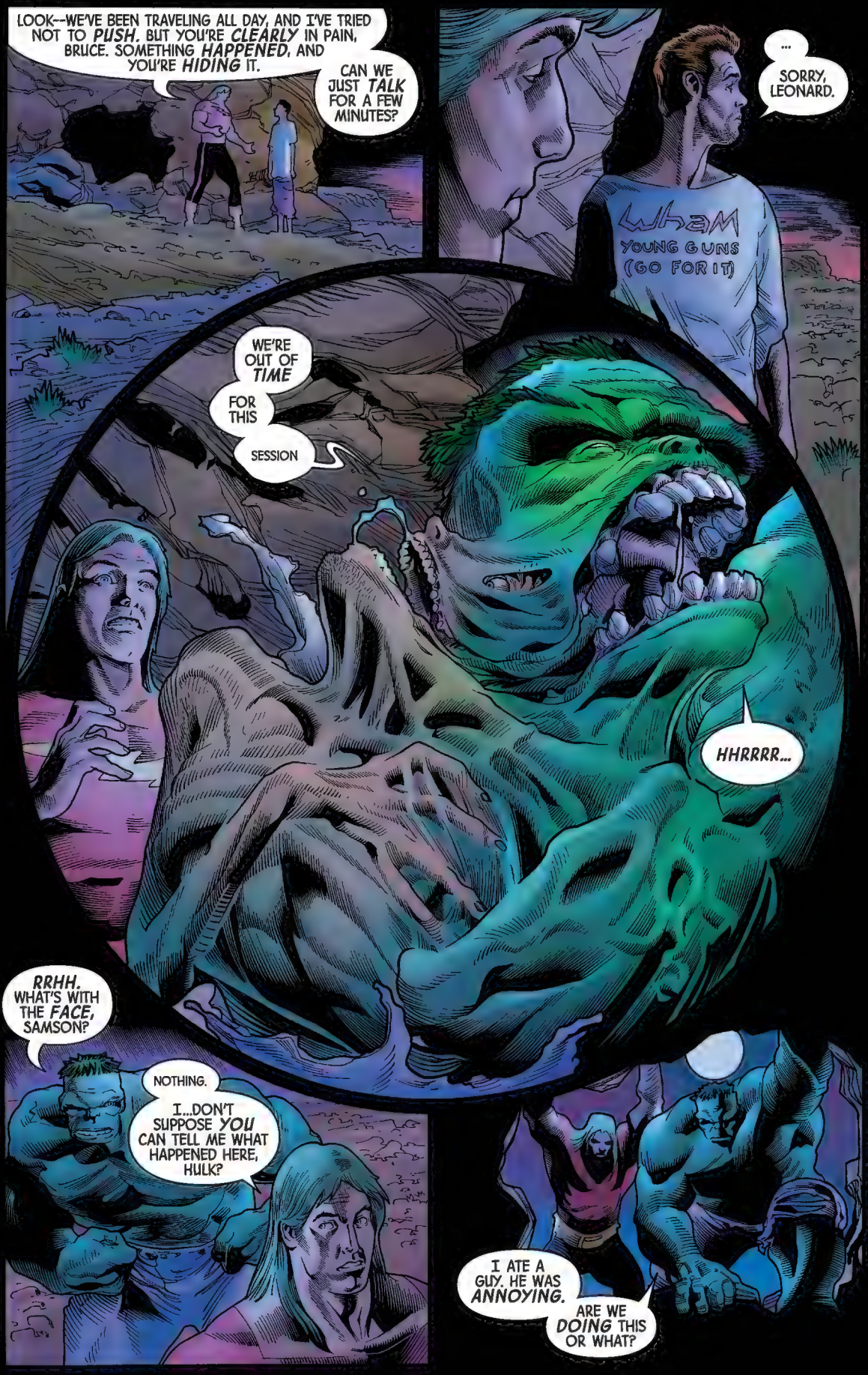
ARIZONA.
Then he called me an insect and slapped me across the room.
And that was how I met the Hulk.
HMM.
HEY, JACKIE.
LISTEN, CAN I HAVE A WORD?
SURE, MURRAY.
I WAS JUST FLIPPING THROUGH RICK JONES' AUTOBIOGRAPHY.
Sidekick
by
Rick Jones
I'M THINKING THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING THERE. HE WAS THE FIRST PERSON TO MEET THE HULK.
IT COULD BE, I DON'T KNOW--A HUMAN INTEREST PIECE--
RIGHT. NOT A NEWS PIECE.
JACKIE--YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU SAID WE BROKE THE HULK STORY, SO WE HAD TO KEEP BREAKING IT?
IT WAS RIGHT BEFORE YOU GOT US THAT EXCLUSIVE FROM CAPTAIN MARVEL, IN SPACE.
...YEAH. I REMEMBER.
GREAT.
BECAUSE I KIND OF NEED THE JACKIE McGEE WHO SAID THAT BACK ON MY STAFF.


MURRAY...
YOU SAID IT YOURSELF. IT'S YOUR STORY, JACKS.
IT'S THE HERALD'S STORY.
YEAH. BUT IT COMES WITH A PRICE.
BRUCE BANNER'S WORLD, HIS LIFE...IT'S HORROR, MURRAY. IT'S HELL.
YOU SEE THINGS THERE.
THINGS YOU CAN'T UNSEE.
AND WHAT IS OUR BIG HULK STORY, ANYWAY? THAT HE'S BACK? THERE'S FOOTAGE OF HIM CHATTING WITH SPACE RACCOONS IN MANHATTAN.
WHAT DO WE HAVE NOW THAT THE NATIONAL PAPERS DON'T?
WELL... THERE'S THIS.
AN OLD CONTACT IN CALIFORNIA SENT ME THESE.
CRIME SCENE PHOTOS. HOUSE NEAR THE BEACH-- TORN APART FROM THE INSIDE.
SO JUST ANOTHER SIGHTING? MURRAY, COME ON--


THE PROPERTY IS REGISTERED TO *ELIZABETH ROSS-BANNER.*
LORD...
AFTER HER DAD'S *FUNERAL*, SHE TOOK A TAXI FROM THE AIRPORT. DRIVER SAID SOME *HOMELESS GUY* WAS WAITING FOR HER-- SKINNY, BROWN HAIR.
AND NOW SHE'S *MISSING.*
THERE'S A FLIGHT TO *LAX* IN THREE HOURS. YOU CAN GET OUT TO THE PROPERTY BY SUNDOWN.
AND JUST BETWEEN *US?* THE BOARD TOOK A *MEETING* THIS MORNING. WE'RE *EXPANDING.*
NEW OFFICES, MORE STAFF...WIDER *DISTRIBUTION.*
THE *HERALD* IS GOING *NATIONAL*-- THANKS TO THE *HULK.*
NO PRESSURE.
A lot of people ask why I keep chasing after Bruce. Is it envy?
RIGHT. NO *PRESSURE...*
I'll admit--early on, I was curious about what it was like being him.
But there was always more to it than that.

NEW MEXICO.
Bruce Banner gave his life to save mine. I *owe* him--that's the bottom line.
HERE.
WHA
YO
And deep down, I think I knew even then that if it came to it...
...he'd do it all over again.
YOU THINK *THIS* IS THE SPOT?
THUMMM
IF THAT'S THE *TUNNEL* HULK DUG, THEN THIS IS WHERE THE *GOVERNMENT* BROUGHT ME AFTER WHAT HAPPENED IN *IOWA*. THIS *MOUNTAIN*.
OR *SOMEONE* DID, ANYWAY--I DON'T REMEMBER MOST OF IT. I WAS *DEAD*, I THINK.
BUT I CAME TO RIGHT AROUND *HERE*, AFTER THE HULK...AFTER HE...HE...
AFTER HE BROKE OUT.
...
IS SOMETHING *WRONG*, BRUCE?
NOTHING.
WE CAN'T WASTE TIME ON *ME*, LEONARD. THEY'VE *STOLEN RICK'S CORPSE*--
AND WE KNOW THAT FOR *SURE*?

YES, I'M SURE. IT FITS THE FACTS AS WE KNOW THEM.
YOU WERE THE ONE WHO SPOKE TO THE GROUNDSKEEPER AT THE GRAVEYARD, REMEMBER?
"RICK'S BODY WAS EXHUMED. BY LITERAL 'MEN IN BLACK' WITH OFFICIAL CLEARANCE.
"IT DIDN'T EVEN MAKE THE PAPERS--WHAT DOES THAT TELL US?"
THIS IS THE LEAD I HAVE, LEONARD. THESE ARE THE DOTS I CAN JOIN. AND I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING.
RICK DIED BECAUSE I WASN'T THERE. AND THEN HIS MURDERER RECRUITED ME--SOME PART OF ME--FOR HIS CAUSE.
FOR MONTHS, I COULDN'T EVEN VISIT HIS GRAVE. I WAS... ASHAMED TO.
WELL, I'M NOT LETTING HIM DOWN AGAIN.
WHAT ABOUT BETTY? DOESN'T SHE NEED US?
SHE WAS SHOT DEAD--AND THEN SHE GOT UP AGAIN AND SMASHED THROUGH A WALL, APPARENTLY.
"SOMEHOW I DOUBT RICK'S GOING THROUGH ANYTHING LIKE THAT RIGHT NOW..."


LOOK--WE'VE BEEN TRAVELING ALL DAY, AND I'VE TRIED NOT TO PUSH. BUT YOU'RE CLEARLY IN PAIN, BRUCE. SOMETHING HAPPENED, AND YOU'RE HIDING IT.
CAN WE JUST TALK FOR A FEW MINUTES?
...
SORRY, LEONARD.
Wham
YOUNG GUNS (GO FOR IT)
WE'RE OUT OF TIME FOR THIS SESSION
HHRRRR...
RRHH. WHAT'S WITH THE FACE, SAMSON?
NOTHING.
I...DON'T SUPPOSE YOU CAN TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED HERE, HULK?
I ATE A GUY. HE WAS ANNOYING.
ARE WE DOING THIS OR WHAT?

SHADOW BASE SITE A.
HNH.
LOOKS LIKE NOBODY'S CLEANED UP SINCE I WAS HERE.
GUESS THEY WEREN'T LYING ABOUT ABANDONING THE PLACE.
BRUCE SEEMED TO THINK WE'D FIND RICK HERE...
NAH. WE'LL FIND SOMETHING, THOUGH.
WITH ME ON THE LOOSE, THEY'D WANT TO LEAVE IN A HURRY. I'M BETTING THEY LEFT SOMETHING BEHIND...
-SNFF-
RRENK
HRRHH.
I SMELL GAMMA.
LET'S SEE WHAT'S THROUGH THIS--
HOO, BOY.
WHEN YOU SAID, "LEFT SOMETHING BEHIND"...
...I THOUGHT YOU MEANT CLUES.

SURE.

MY KIND OF CLUES.

People think the Hulk is a monster.

HOOH! HOOH!

AW, LOOK AT THAT--

And, okay, maybe they've got a point.

--HE THINKS HE'S *PEOPLE!*

Maybe sometimes he is.

But who made him that way?
THE COCOON STAGE IS-- IS ALMOST COMPLETE, GENERAL--
GOD--
I'm of two minds about that.
I was the one who destroyed Bruce's life. Without Rick Jones, there'd be no Hulk, right?
I'M SORRY, JONES.
I'M REALLY SORRY.
But here's something it took me a while to understand:
LET'S KEEP IT PROFESSIONAL, McGOWAN--
GENERAL FORTEAN, SIR?
Bruce was already haunted by the Hulk.
Or maybe enthralled.
YOU WERE RIGHT, GENERAL. THEY FOUND OUT.
THEY FOUND OUT AND THEY CAME RUNNING.
GOOD.
SPRING THE TRAP ON MY SIGNAL.
So if I opened the door to Bruce's haunted house...

...there were already some big holes in the walls.
CALIFORNIA.
QUITE A MESS, AIN'T IT?
YEAH. IT... BRINGS BACK MEMORIES.
DO YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WOMAN WHO LIVED HERE? MRS. ROSS-BANNER?
SHERIFF
THE HULK'S EX-WIFE? OFFICIALLY, IT'S A MISSING PERSONS.
UNOFFICIALLY?
WELL...YOU'RE THE CLOSEST THING TO A HULK EXPERT I CAN TALK TO RIGHT NOW--SO I'M HAPPY TO TALK, MS. McGEE--
--BUT THERE ARE ELEMENTS OF THIS CASE WE'RE NOT READY TO MAKE PUBLIC.
HALF THE CONVERSATIONS I HAVE ARE OFF THE RECORD, DETECTIVE.
AND IF YOU WANT TO TAKE IT FURTHER--I PROTECT MY SOURCES. ASK ANYONE.
OFF THE RECORD, THEN. FORENSICS FOUND BLOOD, BONE FRAGMENTS AND BRAIN MATTER. SO IT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD.
SOMEBODY DIED IN THAT HOUSE-- BEFORE IT GOT SMASHED, JUDGING BY THE BLOOD SPATTER ON THE WRECKAGE.
YOU...THINK THE HULK KILLED HER?
I DOUBT IT. WE FOUND A BULLET HOLE, FOR ONE--SHOT CAME FROM OUTSIDE, WE THINK.
FOR ANOTHER... WELL, WHATEVER BROUGHT ONE OF THOSE WALLS DOWN--

--IT LEFT *THIS* BEHIND.
LIKE AN EAGLE FEATHER...BUT *BLOOD-RED...*
LIKE I *SAID*, MS. McGEE-- RIGHT NOW, *YOU'RE* OUR HULK EXPERT.
WHAT KIND OF HULK LEAVES *THAT?*
There's more than one kind of monster.

OFF!
Sometimes it's a great green beast, smashing because it's the only way it can let the pain out.
Sometimes it looks at you through stone-gray eyes that know just how to hurt you.
AND YOU...
WANNA PLAY, FIDO?
PLAY DEAD.
Sometimes it's the Devil himself.
And sometimes it looks like just a man.
HULK-- LITTLE HELP--
Like someone you trust.
YEAH, YEAH. I'VE SEEN THE MOVIES--THE BAT GUY ALWAYS WINS.
LEAVE IT TO ME, SAMSON.

I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT.
Like a father.
HORRIBLE.
YOU ENJOYED THAT, DIDN'T YOU?
...YEAH.
YEAH, I REALLY DID.
AND THAT AIN'T GOOD...
NO, IT'S NOT GOOD. IT'S NOT HEALTHY.
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU TO REALIZE THAT FOR--
SHUT UP, SAMSON. THINK ABOUT IT.
YOU FIGURE SHADOW BASE LIKES THEIR BIOWEAPONS FREE RANGE? THEY SET 'EM LOOSE SO I'D HAVE SOMETHING TO FIGHT.
KEEPS ME HAPPY. KEEPS ME DISTRACTED--
NOW.
Or maybe a general.

--WHILE THEY MOVE THEIR GUY IN TO--
OH NO.
PLINK
I've been a sidekick for years now.
I've seen a lot.
HULK--
AAARRR--
--RRRGGH!
W-WHAT...? I'M AWAKE...?
IT'S NIGHT... SHOULD BE HIS TIME...
UV RADIATION MIXED WITH VISIBLE LIGHT.
WE CALL THEM SOLAR EMITTERS, BANNER.

CHOOM
WE GOT THE IDEA FROM IOWA.
I've seen the bad guys win.
I've watched the good guys die.
LEONARD!
BEAUTIFUL DAY IN HERE, ISN'T IT? ALL THAT SUN, JUST EVERYWHERE. MAYBE I'LL WORK ON MY TAN.
MAYBE I'LL GO FOR A RUN. WANT TO JOIN ME?
WHAT?
ON YOUR MARK. GET SET.
GO.
PUM
AAARRH--
And if there's one thing I've learned, it's this:

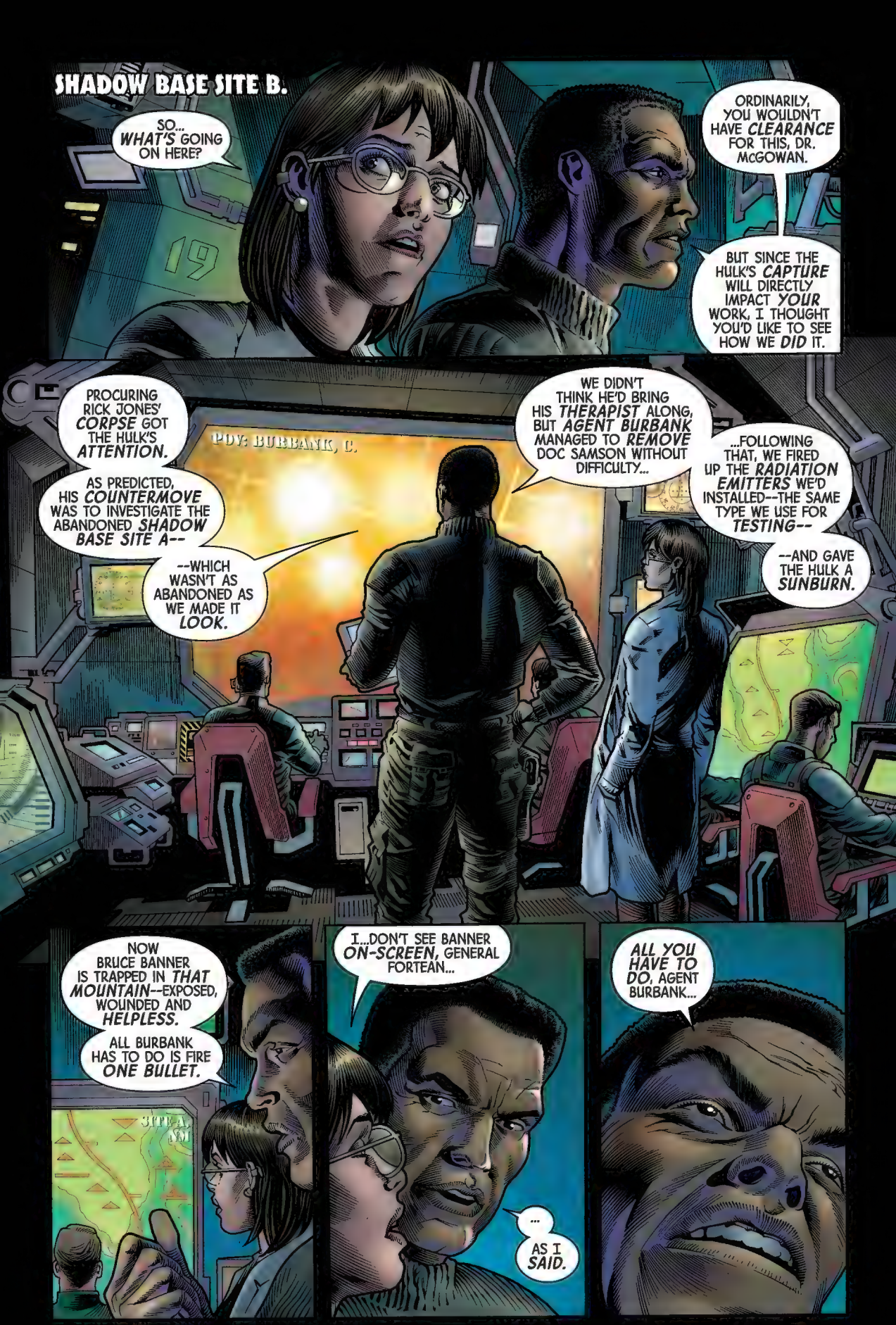
YOU KNOW, I'VE GOT THE GENERAL GROWLING IN MY EAR RIGHT NOW. HE SOUNDS LIKE MY DAD.
"AGENT BURBANK! BUSHWACKER! DON'T PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD, YOU BAD BOY!"
AND IF THE HULK WERE HERE, HE'D HAVE A POINT. BUT HE'S NOT, IS HE, BRUCE?
PUM
The real monster in your life doesn't do loud rants in loud costumes.
GOT TO... GET AWAY... HIDE...
GOT TO HIDE...
The real monster stays quiet.
BRUCE BANNER'S HERE! BRUCE BANNER'S GOING TO FEEL EVERY SECOND!
AND BRUCE BANNER'S GOING TO DIE SLOW!
PUM PUM
19
He doesn't gloat or give speeches.
"BRUCE BANNER."
I GOT SOME NEWS FOR YOU, BIG SHOT.
He's got a reputation to think about.
GOT... GOT TO...
...
HEH.
Keeps his head down.

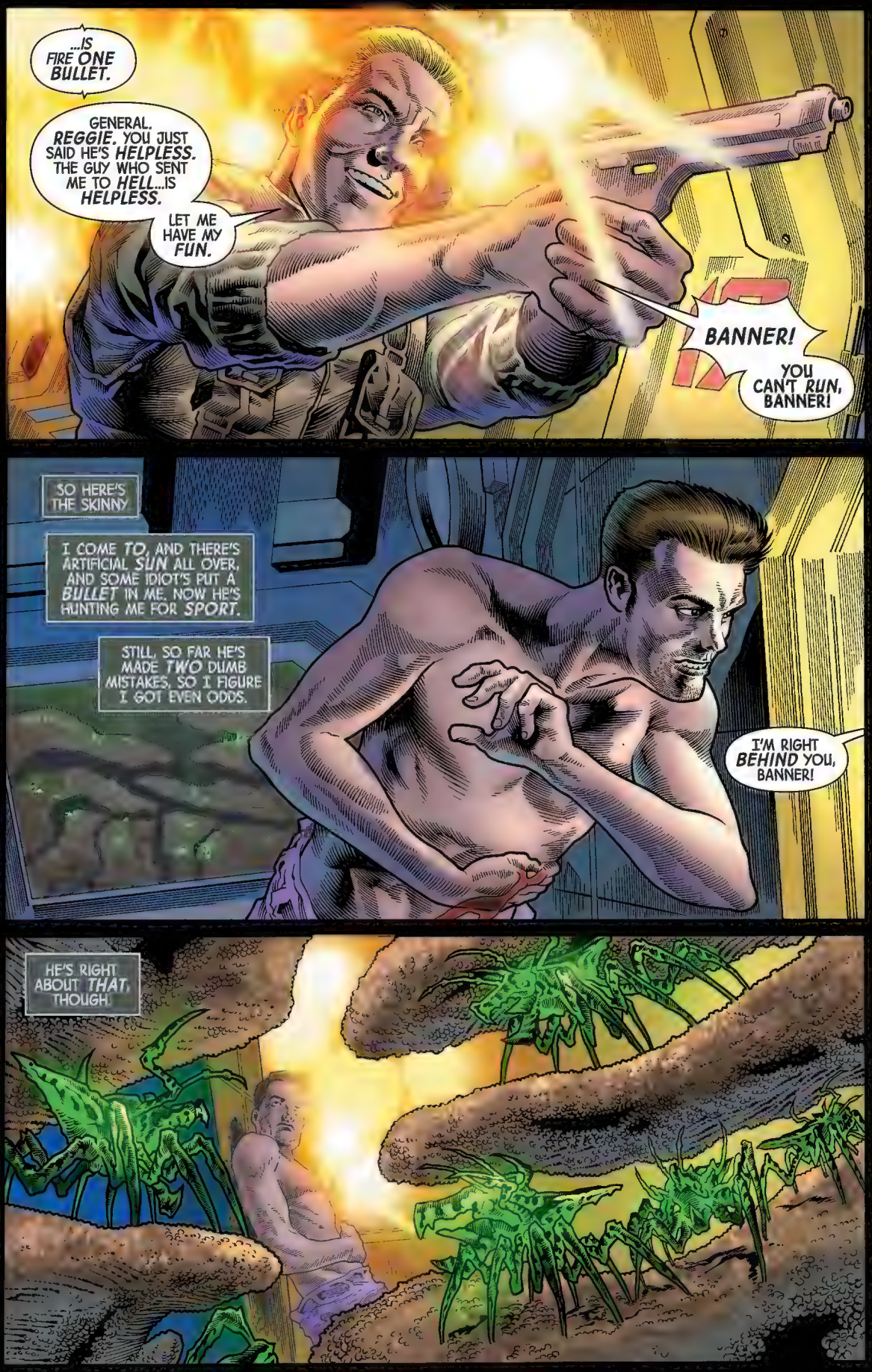
# IT'S JOE

17

"NOBODY TELLS ME WHAT TO DO. YOU KEEP NEEDLIN' ME, AND IF I WANT TO, I'M GONNA TAKE THIS JOINT APART. AND YOU'RE NOT GONNA KNOW WHAT HIT YA."

– JOHN PAXTON & BEN MADDOW
*THE WILD ONE*


SHADOW BASE SITE B.
SO... WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
ORDINARILY, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE CLEARANCE FOR THIS, DR. McGOWAN.
BUT SINCE THE HULK'S CAPTURE WILL DIRECTLY IMPACT YOUR WORK, I THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HOW WE DID IT.
PROCURING RICK JONES' CORPSE GOT THE HULK'S ATTENTION.
AS PREDICTED, HIS COUNTERMOVE WAS TO INVESTIGATE THE ABANDONED SHADOW BASE SITE A--
--WHICH WASN'T AS ABANDONED AS WE MADE IT LOOK.
POV: BURBANK, C.
WE DIDN'T THINK HE'D BRING HIS THERAPIST ALONG, BUT AGENT BURBANK MANAGED TO REMOVE DOC SAMSON WITHOUT DIFFICULTY...
...FOLLOWING THAT, WE FIRED UP THE RADIATION EMITTERS WE'D INSTALLED--THE SAME TYPE WE USE FOR TESTING--
--AND GAVE THE HULK A SUNBURN.
NOW BRUCE BANNER IS TRAPPED IN THAT MOUNTAIN--EXPOSED, WOUNDED AND HELPLESS.
ALL BURBANK HAS TO DO IS FIRE ONE BULLET.
I...DON'T SEE BANNER ON-SCREEN, GENERAL FORTEAN...
...AS I SAID.
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO, AGENT BURBANK...


...IS FIRE ONE BULLET.
GENERAL. REGGIE. YOU JUST SAID HE'S HELPLESS. THE GUY WHO SENT ME TO HELL...IS HELPLESS.
LET ME HAVE MY FUN.
BANNER!
YOU CAN'T RUN, BANNER!
SO HERE'S THE SKINNY
I COME TO, AND THERE'S ARTIFICIAL SUN ALL OVER, AND SOME IDIOT'S PUT A BULLET IN ME. NOW HE'S HUNTING ME FOR SPORT.
STILL, SO FAR HE'S MADE TWO DUMB MISTAKES, SO I FIGURE I GOT EVEN ODDS.
I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU, BANNER!
HE'S RIGHT ABOUT THAT, THOUGH.

I NEED TO MAKE A LITTLE SPACE
KRIISH
WHAT'S THAT NOISE, BANNER?
TRYING TO SMASH THE EMITTERS? GET SOME DARKNESS? GOOD LUCK--THEY'RE EVERYWHERE.
OR--WAIT, ARE YOU SCROUNGING TECH? YOU GONNA INVENT YOUR WAY OUT OF THIS?
IS THAT IT?
YOU GONNA MAKE SOMETHING REALLY SMART?
YEAH.
AAHH--
RADIOACTIVE ANTS IN YER EYES, BIG SHOT!
DOES THAT REALLY SMART?

'CAUSE THIS IS GONNA--
KRAKK
OKAY. THE ANTS WERE A SHOCK.
BUT A PUNCH IN THE FACE?
ARRH!
DAMN IT-- NOT USED TO THIS PUNY BODY--
WHAT'RE YOU--MADE OF--
SUPER-TOUGH PLASTIC, COURTESY OF THE CIA. I'M A CYBORG, BRUCE.
AND YOU'RE--
NOT BRUCE.
LIKE I SAID-- TWO DUMB MISTAKES.
WHAT?
HEY--
THE FIRST WAS THINKING I WAS BANNER.
THE SECOND...

IT'S JOE.
WHUNCH
...WAS THINKING I WAS HELPLESS.
GUESS THOSE AIN'T PLASTIC.
YOU HAVIN' FUN YET?
HNNNGHH--
'CAUSE I AM.
I DON'T DO HELPLESS.
GET UP, AGENT BURBANK. YOU'RE NOT CRITICALLY DAMAGED.
EASY... FOR YOU TO SAY...
WHERE'D THE LITTLE CREEP LEARN TO FIGHT LIKE THAT...?

ANY NUMBER OF PLACES.
HE ALTERNATES BETWEEN LIVING OUTSIDE SOCIETY AND LIVING WITH THE AVENGERS. HE'LL HAVE PICKED THINGS UP.
HE CALLED HIMSELF "JOE"...
GLYN--CAN YOU CROSS-CHECK THE OLD ROSS FILES?
SURE THING.
HERE WE ARE-- BANNER ONCE WORKED FOR A LAS VEGAS CASINO UNDER THE NAME "JOE FIXIT."
HIS SKIN WAS GRAY AT THE TIME-- THAT CONFIGURATION HASN'T BEEN SEEN MUCH SINCE. HE WAS VULNERABLE TO SUNLIGHT BACK THEN, TOO...
THE BODY WAS.
IS THERE ANYTHING STOPPING BANNER FROM GOING THROUGH A PERSONALITY SHIFT WITHOUT HULKING OUT? IS THAT AGAINST THE RULES?
IF HE'S TAUGHT US ONE THING, IT'S NOT TO LOOK FOR RULES.
SMITH-- CAN WE GET A REMOTE VIEW ON BANNER?
MONITOR TEAM CAN'T GET AN EXACT FIX, SIR. TOO MUCH MOUNTAIN.
FINE. WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE DO WITH BURBANK.

"MAKE DO"?
DID I STUTTER, AGENT?
I'VE TOLERATED YOUR IDIOSYNCRASIES BECAUSE UP UNTIL NOW, THEY GOT RESULTS.
BUT THE TIME FOR PLAYING GAMES IS OVER. NO MORE GRANDSTANDING, "BUSHWACKER."
THE SECOND YOU SEE BANNER--OR FIXIT--YOU SHOOT TO KILL.
THAT IS AN ORDER.
...
SIR, YES, SIR.
OKAY.
THIS PLACE IS NUTS.
ANT FARMS AND HAMSTER RUNS BUILT INTO THE WALLS? AQUARIUMS?
SECTOR A
GUESS THEY LIKE TO KEEP AN EYE ON THEIR EXPERIMENTS...
HUH. THERE'S A FAMILIAR FACE.

HOW'S MY DRIVIN' SO FAR?
YEAH, YEAH. YOU AIN'T THE BOSS OF ME, PALLY.
YOU ASK ME, BANNER SHOULDA KEPT THIS GUY LOCKED UP. THROWIN' HIS WEIGHT AROUND LIKE HE'S--
HMM. THIS FISH TANK...
I CAN SEE RIGHT THROUGH IT.
KRUKK
QUSSH
KRAKK
KIND OF A DESIGN FLAW.
KRISH
A ROOM FULL OF COMPUTERS. AND THEY'RE ALL PLUGGED IN.
WHY? THE PLACE IS ABANDONED--WHAT ARE THEY DOING?
AND HOW LONG HAVE I GOT TO WORK IT OUT?

STILL NO SIGN OF HIM. I DON'T LIKE IT.
HE'S GOT A BULLET WOUND--HE SHOULDN'T BE KEEPING AHEAD OF BURBANK LIKE THAT.
YOU SAID HE DIDN'T LIKE SUNLIGHT?
SMITH--CHANGE THE FREQUENCY ON THE EMITTERS. SHORTEN THE WAVELENGTH TO UVB RADIATION.
YES, SIR--
HRRHH...
I SHOULD WATCH THESE CUTS--BANNER'S PUNY BODY DOESN'T HEAL THE WAY MY OLD ONE DID.
AND IF I BLEED OUT UNDER THESE LIGHTS, THEY'VE GOT US RIGHT WHERE--
AARRGH!
THE--THE LIGHTS-- THE SUNLIGHT--
THEY TURNED IT UP SOMEHOW-- I CAN FEEL IT--
HOPE YOU BROUGHT YOUR SUNSCREEN...
...JOE.

KEEP IT TOGETHER-- BANNER'S BODY CAN TAKE THE SUN--
THEY GOTTA KNOW WHO I AM IF THEY'RE USING THIS ON ME, TRYING TO DRIVE ME OUT, OR BACK IN...
BIG MISTAKE.
THEY JUST GAVE ME ALL THE INFO I NEEDED TO TURN THIS AROUND.
AND MAYBE THE TOOLS TO USE IT, IF THIS IS WHAT I THINK IT IS.
BANNER'S A NERD-- AND I CAN TAP INTO THAT A LITTLE--
RESUME SESSION?
Confirm
Cancel
--BUT HE'S NO COMPUTER NERD. HACKING AIN'T HIS THING.
USERNAME
PASSWORD
AND WE DON'T EXACTLY GOT TIME TO LEARN.
BUT IF THERE'S ONE THING I EVER DID LEARN, IT'S THIS:
SOMETIMES IT AIN'T ABOUT YOU BEIN' SMARTER.
KEOWN

SOMETIMES IT'S ABOUT THE OTHER GUY...
GIGE
...BEIN' DUMBER.
GIGER/HR
AND NOW IT'S TIME FOR THOSE BANNER SMARTS.
USERNAME GIGER/HR
PASSWORD n05tR
'CAUSE I NEED TO WORK FAST...
GENERAL? CHECK THIS OUT. LOOKS LIKE HE SMASHED ONE OF THE AQUARIUMS...
HE'S IN SECTOR A. THE ADMINISTRATION SUITE.
OOH, ADMIN. SHOULD I BE WORRIED?
WE CAN BLOCK HIM TURNING THE LIGHTS OFF FROM HERE. BUT STILL...
...PUT HIM DOWN, BURBANK. NOW.

AND...
...WE'RE DONE.
C:/DIR
DIRECTORY OF C:
RESETTING... PLEASE WAIT
YOU'RE DONE, ALL RIGHT.
TOO BAD WE CAN'T PLAY SOME MORE...
...BUT ORDERS ARE ORDERS.
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
HE'S DOWN, GENERAL.
GOOD WORK.
NOW START CUTTING HIM UP.

GROOVY.
MAKE SURE TO SECURE HIS HEAD FIRST--
WUH...
WAIT.
BURBANK? WHAT'S HE DOING?
HE'S-- STRONGER THAN HE LOOKS, GENERAL--
HOW'D HE GET SO STRONG?
I... SAID...
...WAIT A SEC.
WILLYA?
REALLY.
YOU'RE GONNA WANT TO HEAR THIS.

I FIGURED IT WAS WEIRD, ME TAKING OVER THIS BODY. I MEAN, WHY'D COACH PUT ME IN? I DON'T EVEN LIKE BANNER.
BUT I GET IT NOW. BANNER'S ALL ABOUT SCIENCE, THE SENSES...AND NOT JUST HIM...
I LIKE THOSE THINGS, TOO.
STAY BACK, BANNER!
I'M NOT SCARED OF YOU--
I LIKE HAVING A GOOD TIME...
B-SHOOM
B-SHOOM
AND I LIKE USING MY HEAD.
I LIKE FIGURING STUFF OUT.
LIKE WAYS TO HURT PEOPLE.

THESE "EMITTERS" OF YOURS--YOU CAN PROGRAM WHAT COMES OUT. FROM RIGHT HERE.
MAKE THAT UV MORE INTENSE, RIGHT? HURT ME MORE.
FUNNY STORY.
SIR--HE COULDN'T TURN THE EMITTERS OFF, BUT...IT'S LIKE HE TURNED THEM UP.
THE WAVELENGTH'S COMPRESSING...
OH MY GOD.
BURBANK! GET OUT NOW!
BANNER DOESN'T KNOW COMPUTERS. BUT HE KNOWS RADIATION. HE KNOWS WAVELENGTHS.
PAST VISIBLE LIGHT IS ULTRAVIOLET. TIGHTEN THAT WAVELENGTH, YOU GET X-RAYS.
AND PAST THAT...HHRR... YOU GET...
HHRKK
GAMMA RADIATION!
THE EMITTERS-- HE'S LOCKED US OUT, AND HE'S SET THEM UP FOR--FOR A MASSIVE OVERDOSE OF GAMMA--
BURBANK-- WE'VE LOST VISUAL!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THERE?

AGENT BURBANK-- I REPEAT, WE HAVE LOST VISUAL--
BUSHWACKER, RESPOND--
SMITH-- GET ME A SATELLITE FEED--
I'LL PULL ONE UP, SIR, BUT WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO SEE INSIDE THE...
...THE MOUNTAIN...
SITE A, NM
GOD IN HEAVEN.
THE MOUNTAIN... IT'S...
...GONE...
ALL THAT...THAT GAMMA... I...
...I GUESS HE HAD TO LET IT OUT.
... SUBJECT B.
TELL ME HE'S READY.

HUMAN ERROR WAS THE PROBLEM HERE.
BURBANK'S SADISM--HIS NEED FOR REVENGE--MADE HIM SLOPPY. AND BANNER WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN INTO THE SYSTEM IF IT HAD BEEN PROPERLY SECURED.
EVEN THE AQUARIUM DESIGN... ESSENTIALLY, WE PUT A LOCKED STEEL DOOR NEXT TO A GLASS WALL.
THAT WAS JEFF'S IDEA, BACK WHEN ALL THIS WAS BEING DESIGNED. HE SAID HAVING THE EXPERIMENTS ON DISPLAY PROMOTED WORK-LIFE SYNERGY.
THEY DID SOMETHING SIMILAR AT HIS, UH...TECH START-UP...
YOU MEAN HIS LARGE-SCALE INVESTMENT FRAUD.
THANKFULLY DR. CLIVE, GOD REST HIS SOUL, IS NO LONGER HERE TO MAKE SUCH DECISIONS. YOU'RE HEAD OF RESEARCH NOW.
TELL ME ABOUT SUBJECT B, DR. McGOWAN.
YOU KNOW THE BASICS. WE USED RICK JONES' BODY AS A KIND OF SCAFFOLDING--FOR A SHELL OF GAMMA-ACTIVATED TISSUE...
...RECOVERED FROM THE CORPSE OF EMIL BLONSKY.
IT WOKE UP TODAY, GENERAL. IT LOOKED AT US.
YOU WANT TO ELIMINATE HUMAN ERROR?

# ABOMINATION

18

"Nothing is intolerable that is necessary."

– Jeremy Taylor
*The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*

NEW MEXICO.
THE REMAINS OF
SHADOW BASE SITE A.
HNN--
HNNF--
HHOOFF.
WELL.
HERE WE ARE AGAIN, LEONARD.

AND WE STILL DON'T KNOW--
OH, WHAT NOW?
UH... EXCUSE ME?
DOC SAMSON, RIGHT? WALTER LANGKOWSKI. AND THIS IS GAMMA FLIGHT.
HI.
CAN YOU, UH...TELL US WHAT HAPPENED HERE?
HE WENT THATAWAY.

EIGHT DAYS LATER.
THE PROBLEM WITH NEVER SEEING YOUR OWN REFLECTION...
...IS NEVER KNOWING WHEN THERE'S SOMETHING ON YOUR FACE.
THIS IS A NEW DEVELOPMENT. HOW LONG WAS I GONE?
THE LAST THING I REMEMBER WAS...FEAR, NEEDING TO HIDE...AND THEN...
IT FELT LIKE THE CHANGE--BUT I DIDN'T CHANGE. IT WAS MORE LIKE... EVERYTHING WENT GRAY.
SO JOE'S BACK--THE "GRAY HULK." HE'S BEEN QUIET FOR YEARS.
AND IF I DIDN'T CHANGE--HE'S BEEN USING MY BODY. WHICH IS... UNUSUAL.
HMM. JOE...THE CURRENT HULK... THE "BIG GUY"...
I SHOULD PROBABLY MAKE A LIST.

BUT FIRST THINGS FIRST.
THESE CLOTHES ARE STORE-BOUGHT. MY SIZE. SHOES, EVEN. WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO, JOE?
I NEED TO TRIANGULATE.
SORRY, UH... HOW LONG UNTIL WE REACH OUR DESTINATION?
NOT TOO FAR NOW. YOUR MOTEL'S COMING UP ON THE RIGHT.
A RENTED MOTEL ON THE EDGE OF TOWN. OKAY, AT LEAST JOE'S BEING DISCREET.
KNOWING HIM, I'D ASSUMED HE'D BOOKED SOME GLITZY PENTHOUSE SUITE IN A...
...CASINO.
BLAST IT, JOE.
WHY ARE YOU LIKE THIS?
RENO. THAT'S TELLING. IF JOE HAD HIS CHOICE, IT'D BE LAS VEGAS--HIS HOME GROUND. BUT IF HULK'S CALLING THE SHOTS...
...RENO IS RIGHT ON THE BORDER WITH CALIFORNIA.
Moonlight Casino
MAKES SENSE.
IF SHADOW BASE IS A DEAD END FOR NOW...

...THEN WE HAVE OTHER PRIORITIES.
CALIFORNIA.
NOTES ON THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BETTY BANNER...
POLICE LINE DO NOT
DO NOT CROSS
POL
IT'S BEEN EIGHT DAYS. STILL NO SIGN OF MRS. BANNER-- OR HER BODY.
IT MADE FOR A COUPLE OF DECENT PIECES... NOT EXACTLY "ELF ARMY INVADES EARTH," BUT DECENT, CONSIDERING...
...BUT FRANKLY, AFTER "HULK'S WIFE MISSING" AND "HULK'S WIFE STILL MISSING," THE WELL IS RUNNING DRY.
STILL, DETECTIVE BAO SAID I COULD LOOK AROUND WHENEVER I WANTED, AND I CAN'T SLEEP, SO...
...WHY NOT NOW?
I THINK BAO'S HOPING HIS UNOFFICIAL "HULK EXPERT" WILL FIND SOMETHING HE'S MISSED.
NOT MUCH CHANCE OF THAT. WE ALREADY FOUND ALL THE PIECES--WE JUST DON'T KNOW HOW THEY FIT TOGETHER.
AND NOBODY CAN TELL US, EXCEPT--
SMASHED.

MY LIFE. MY SELF.
ALL OF IT.
ALL SMASHED. BY HIM...
...AND ME.
SNFF
SNFF
HE'S CLOSE.
HIDING.
HE ALWAYS HIDES. WHO HE IS...
BUT YOU SAW.
YES?
...MRS. BANNER.
JACKIE McGEE. I'M A REPORTER WITH THE ARIZONA HERALD.

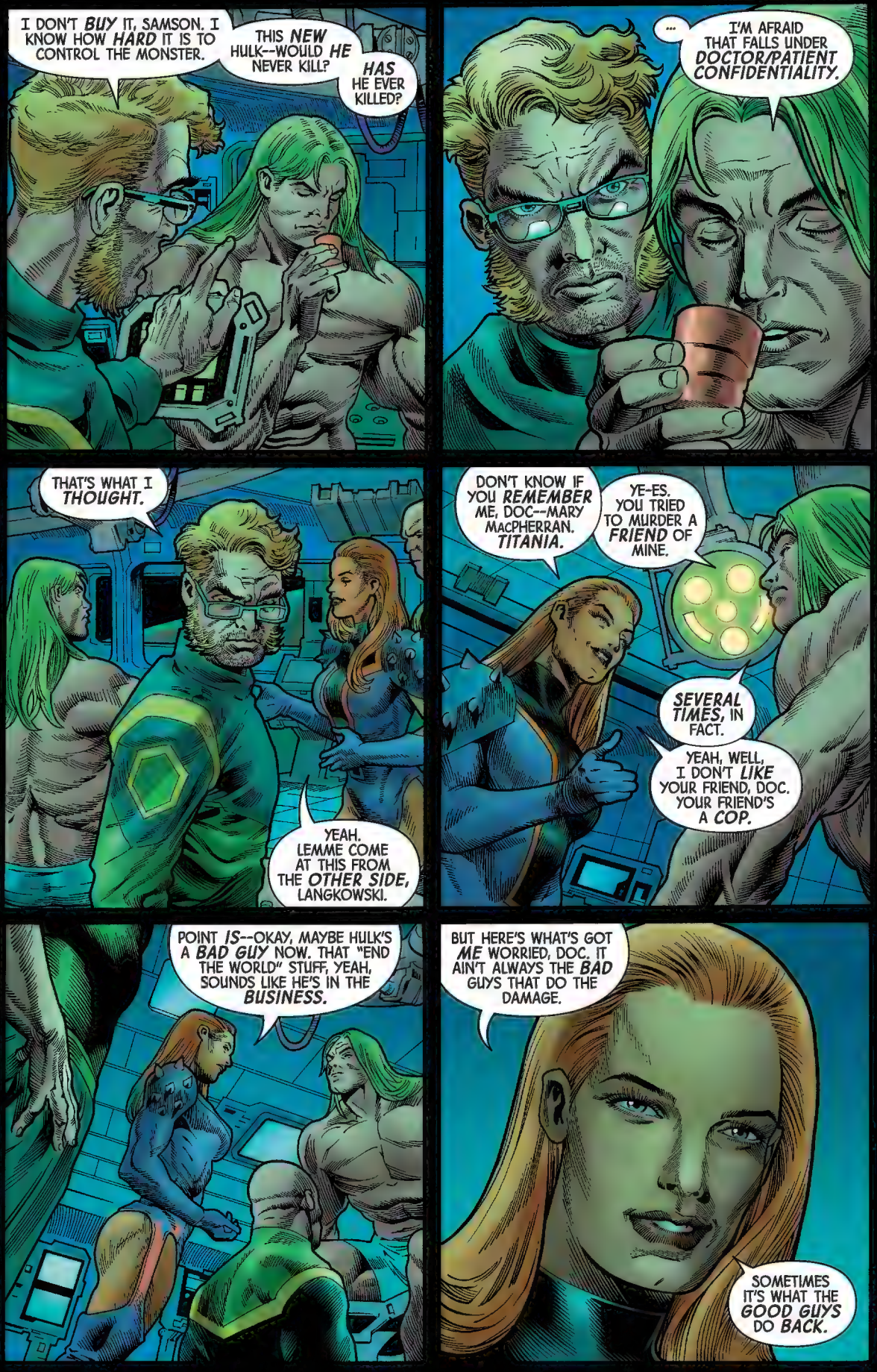
"I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS."
THIS IS IT, RIGHT? THE FRIEDRICH?
WELL... MY GUT SAYS IT IS, SO...
WHAT? MAN, DON'T START PLAYING GAMES HERE, OKAY? IS THIS YOU OR ISN'T IT?
...
THAT'S THE BIG QUESTION, ISN'T IT?
FRIEDRICH INN
MAN--
SORRY. I'M A LITTLE DRUNK.
KEEP THE CHANGE.
PFFT.
JACKASS.
UNGH!
CRRNNK

HHLLK.
NO.
KRRIS
SHH
NO NO
NO PLEASE
NO--
NO!
NO!

MR. BANCROFT! YOU'RE BACK--AND IS THAT A NEW SUIT I SEE?
YOU MUST HAVE HAD A GOOD NIGHT AT THE TABLES!
OH, GOD. JOE MADE AN IMPRESSION.
HE CAN BE CHARMING WHEN HE WANTS TO BE--I REMEMBER THAT BUSINESS WITH MARLO CHANDLER. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HER...?
IT'LL LOOK STRANGE IF I DON'T SAY ANYTHING.
UGH. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO DO HIS VOICE-- I HATE THAT--
UH...YEAH. HADDA...SWELL TIME.
REAL SWELL.
SEE YOUSE INNA MORNIN'.
ONE DAY I'LL GET LEONARD TO TELL ME WHY SO MANY HULKS TALK LIKE RALPH MEEKER IN KISS ME DEADLY.
POOR LEONARD.
I HOPE HE'S OKAY...
...HUH. LOOKS LIKE... SOME KIND OF COMMOTION OUT THERE.
OH, BOY. YOU'RE RIGHT, ANNA.
I CAN'T MAKE IT OUT-- DID SOMEONE HAVE A CRASH?
COVER THE DESK, MARGE.
I'LL GO SEE WHAT THAT IS...

ALL RIGHT.
HERE'S HOW IT LOOKS TO ME.
"BANNER" FORM
Bruce
Joe Fixit
"HULK" FORM
"Devil" Hulk
Savage/Child Hulk
MISSING/DORMANT??
Professor
"Green Scar
I KNOW, I KNOW... IT'S RULES, IT'S STRUCTURE, YOU HATE IT.
THAT'S FINE. STRUCTURE'S MY SIDE OF THINGS, AFTER ALL. AND I NEED TO START PULLING MY WEIGHT.
YOU'VE PROTECTED ME, WHILE I'VE BEEN... RECOVERING. BUT IF WE'RE REALLY DOING THIS...
...IT CAN'T BE ALL YOU. IT CAN'T BE CHAOTIC.
NOT IF WE REALLY WANT TO END THE WORLD.
HE SAID HE WANTS TO WHAT?

ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
END THE HUMAN WORLD.
TO BE FAIR, I THINK HE JUST MEANT HUMAN CIVILIZATION AS WE CURRENTLY UNDERSTAND IT.
SO IT'S PROBABLY FINE, EH?
UM--I KINDA LIKE HUMAN CIVILIZATION, DOC...
I LIKE IT TOO, MR. CREEL. THE PHONES ARE GREAT.
BUT TO AN IMMORTAL MONSTER WATCHING THE EARTH KILL ITSELF...ARE THEY THAT GREAT?
IT'S WHAT HE MIGHT BE PLANNING THAT'S THE ISSUE. IS IT POPULATION REDUCTION? BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY?
DON'T TELL ME HE COULDN'T DO IT...
WELL, SPEAKING AS HIS PSYCHIATRIST, PUCK...NO, HE COULDN'T.
NOT IN ANY INCARNATION WITH A MIND.
LOOK AT THE DAMAGE HE'S DONE OVER THE YEARS--BILLIONS OF DOLLARS, TRILLIONS. AND YET CIVILIANS NEVER DIE IN THESE RAMPAGES.
AMADEUS CHO HAD A THEORY ABOUT THAT. I THINK HE WAS RIGHT.
SUBCONSCIOUSLY, BRUCE BANNER IS CONSTANTLY WORKING TO PRESERVE LIVES.


I DON'T BUY IT, SAMSON. I KNOW HOW HARD IT IS TO CONTROL THE MONSTER.
THIS NEW HULK--WOULD HE NEVER KILL?
HAS HE EVER KILLED?
...
I'M AFRAID THAT FALLS UNDER DOCTOR/PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY.
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.
YEAH. LEMME COME AT THIS FROM THE OTHER SIDE, LANGKOWSKI.
DON'T KNOW IF YOU REMEMBER ME, DOC--MARY MacPHERRAN. TITANIA.
YE-ES. YOU TRIED TO MURDER A FRIEND OF MINE.
SEVERAL TIMES, IN FACT.
YEAH, WELL, I DON'T LIKE YOUR FRIEND, DOC. YOUR FRIEND'S A COP.
POINT IS--OKAY, MAYBE HULK'S A BAD GUY NOW. THAT "END THE WORLD" STUFF, YEAH, SOUNDS LIKE HE'S IN THE BUSINESS.
BUT HERE'S WHAT'S GOT ME WORRIED, DOC. IT AIN'T ALWAYS THE BAD GUYS THAT DO THE DAMAGE.
SOMETIMES IT'S WHAT THE GOOD GUYS DO BACK.

"LOOK AT IOWA.
SO WHAT WAS IT, ANNA? SOMEONE BUMP THE SIGN?
DRUNKS FIGHTING IN THE PARKING LOT A--
A... AAHH...
"LOOK WHAT THE GOOD GUYS DO.
"THEY DO LOVE MAKING THOSE HARD CHOICES.
ANOTHER THING--IF WE ARE ACTING LIKE A SYSTEM, I NEED TO CALL YOU SOMETHING.
YOU CAN'T JUST BE "HULK." YOU'RE ALL HULKS.
AND "DEVIL HULK" JUST FEELS LIKE TEMPTING FATE.
HMH. COULD BE WORSE, I SUPPOSE.
YOU COULD START CALLING YOURSELF THE MAES--
AAEEEIIGHHHHHH
"HOW'D YOU PUT IT, JUDD?
"BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY."

HHHLL-

KK-

OUR--

--OUR FATHER--

--WH-WHO ART IN--

--H-H-HEAVEN--

MAYBE *YOURS* IS.

KRUM
WELL? YOU WAITING FOR A THIRD MONSTER?
MOVE IT, LADY!
HHILL...
KK...
HNH. HEAR THAT, BANNER? HE AIN'T CONFUSED.
AND I BET I KNOW HIS NAME...
ABOMINATION.

LEMME GUESS--
THEY SENT YOU!
SHADOW BASE!
THAT YOU IN THERE, BLONSKY? THEY DIG YOU UP AGAIN SO I CAN PUT YOU DOWN?
OR DID THEY GET SOMEONE ELSE?
HHHULLL!
K-KK-KAH!
ARRHH--
C'MERE!
SAYING MY NAME OVER AND OVER--WHAT'S WITH YOU? WHAT IS THAT?
CONDITIONING? PROGRAMMING?
YOU A MACHINE, OR--

--SOMETHING ELSE--

HELP ME

KILL ME

KILL YOU

HELP

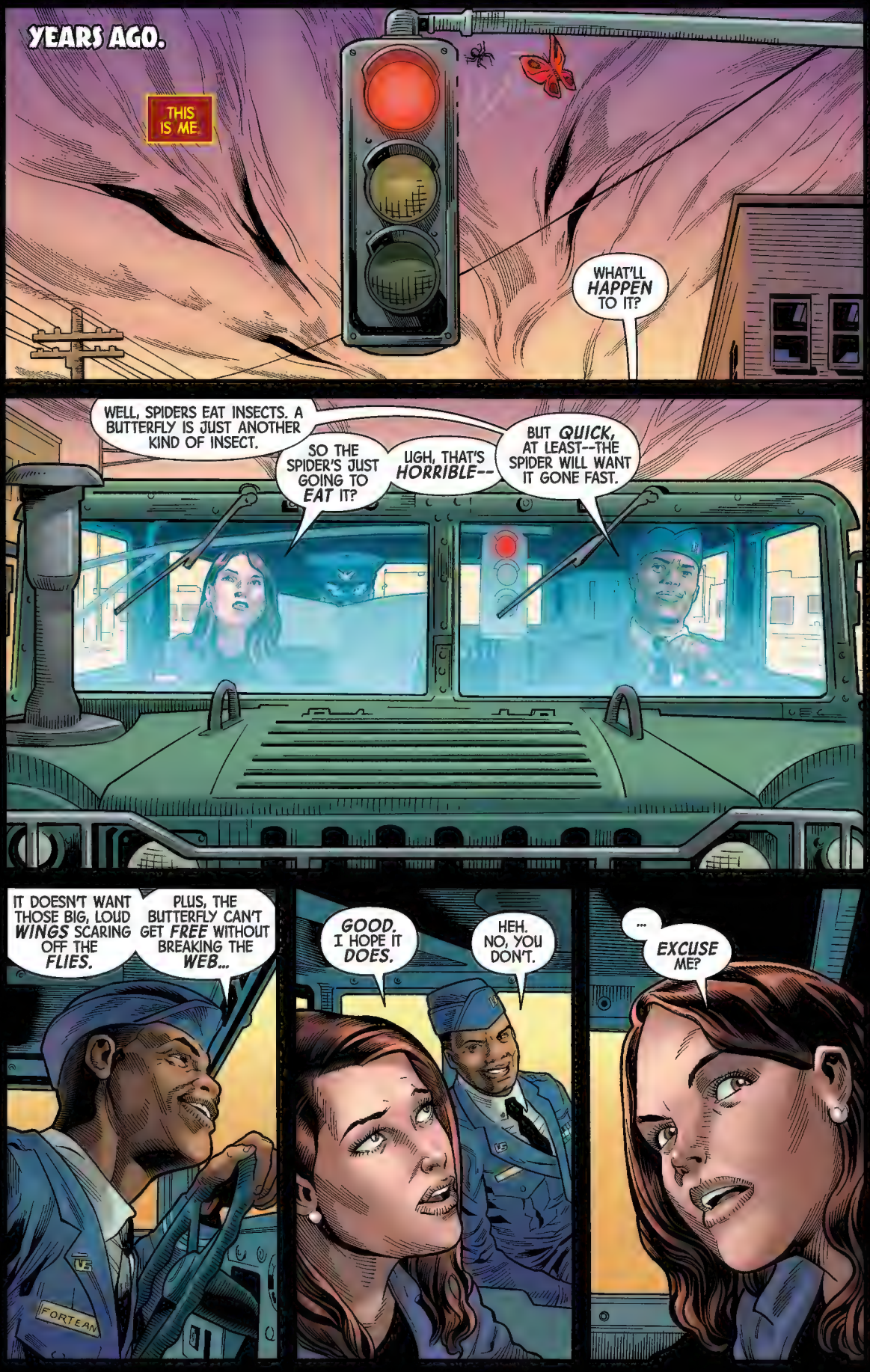
YOU

# NECESSARY

19

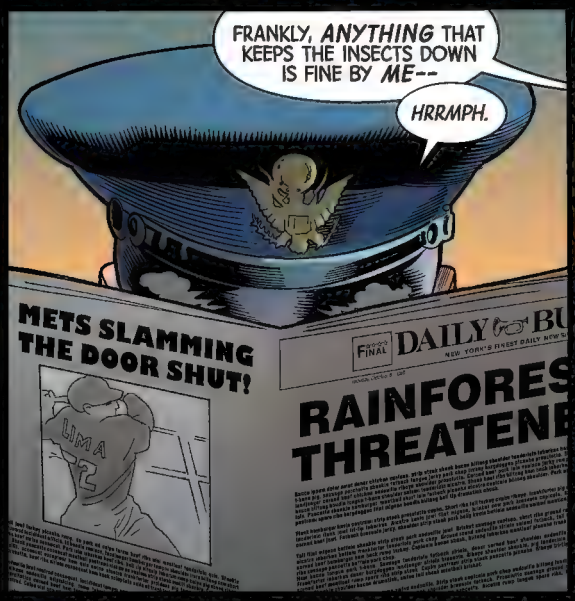
"I WOULD EAT HIS HEART IN THE MARKETPLACE."

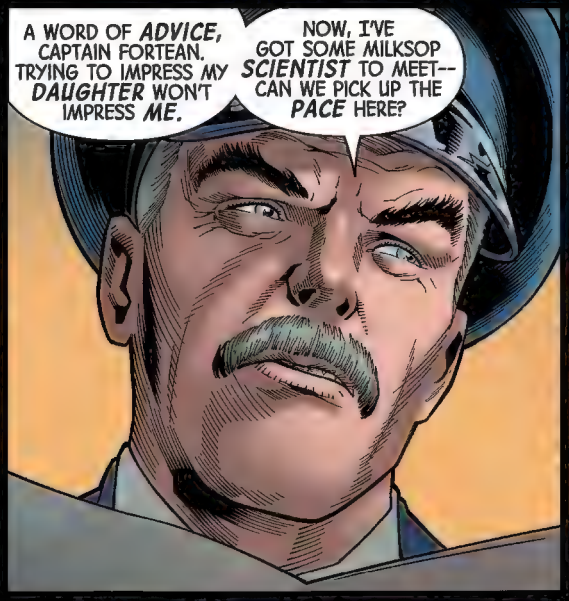
– WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
*MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*, ACT IV, SCENE I


YEARS AGO.
THIS IS ME.
WHAT'LL HAPPEN TO IT?
WELL, SPIDERS EAT INSECTS. A BUTTERFLY IS JUST ANOTHER KIND OF INSECT.
SO THE SPIDER'S JUST GOING TO EAT IT?
UGH, THAT'S HORRIBLE--
BUT QUICK, AT LEAST--THE SPIDER WILL WANT IT GONE FAST.
IT DOESN'T WANT THOSE BIG, LOUD WINGS SCARING OFF THE FLIES.
PLUS, THE BUTTERFLY CAN'T GET FREE WITHOUT BREAKING THE WEB...
GOOD. I HOPE IT DOES.
HEH. NO, YOU DON'T.
...
EXCUSE ME?

YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE THEM, BUT SPIDERS DO A JOB. SO DO THEIR WEBS.
WITHOUT THEM, THE INSECT POPULATION WOULD GET OUT OF CONTROL. WE'D BE DROWNING IN THEM. IT'D BE CHAOS.

SO IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS, THE WEB IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE BUTTERFLY.
IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GREATER GOOD--RIGHT, GENERAL ROSS?


FRANKLY, ANYTHING THAT KEEPS THE INSECTS DOWN IS FINE BY ME--
HRRMPH.
METS SLAMMING THE DOOR SHUT!
DAILY
RAINFORES
THREATENE


A WORD OF ADVICE, CAPTAIN FORTEAN. TRYING TO IMPRESS MY DAUGHTER WON'T IMPRESS ME.
NOW, I'VE GOT SOME MILKSOP SCIENTIST TO MEET--CAN WE PICK UP THE PACE HERE?

YES, SIR, WE CAN.
WE'RE JUST WAITING FOR THE GREEN LIGHT.

THIS IS ME.

NOW.
THIS ANGER IS ME.
FORTEAN!
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?
WHY AM I FINDING OUT FROM MONITOR STATION THAT YOUR ABOMINATION MURDERED TWO CIVILIANS?
YOUR ABOMINATION, DR. MCGOWAN.
GOOD WORK, BY THE WAY. DR. CLIVE WOULD BE PROUD.
I TOLD YOU, GENERAL--SUBJECT B CANNOT BE USED IN POPULATED AREAS!
THERE'S NOTHING HUMAN THERE! NOT JONES, NOT BLONSKY! AND WHATEVER IS DRIVING THAT BUS--
--ALL IT DOES IS KILL!
GENERAL!
THIS RAGE IS ME.
OKAY.
JONES OR NO JONES--

THIS VIOLENCE.
IS ME.
--I'M ALL THROUGH PLAYING NICE WITH--
CHLOPP
--YOU--
SPLORKK
WHAT--?
"THE ACID TEST."
CAN THE CREATURE'S DIGESTIVE SECRETIONS FULLY DEVITALIZE HULK TISSUE...?
VISION IS CLEARING, SIR--

"--LOOKS LIKE THAT'S A 'YES.'"
AARRRHH!
NOT--NOT HEALING--
WHY ISN'T IT HEALING--
HELP ME
KILL YOU
HHOORRP

NNNARRRGGH!
THIS PAIN IS ME
THIS BURNING IS ME
DR. McGOWAN DOES HAVE A POINT, SIR. THIS IS A POPULATED AREA--
AND THAT'S UNFORTUNATE. BUT SACRIFICES HAVE TO BE MADE, WILKINS.
I'M HAPPY TO MAKE THE HARD CHOICES...
YES, SIR. BUT IF THE, UH, THE CIVILIANS IN THE AREA INFORM THE POLICE... WELL, THAT BRINGS MORE CIVILIANS...
THIS COULD SPIRAL, SIR.
LET ME WORRY ABOUT CONTAINMENT, WILKINS.
WE MIGHT NOT HAVE BURBANK ANYMORE--OUR MULTI-TOOL FOR ANY OCCASION--
"--BUT WE DO HAVE PEOPLE."
H-HELLO?
I--I NEED HELP-- PLEASE--
INN
THIS FEAR IS ME

THE FEAR OF THE NIGHTMARE INSIDE
ARE--ARE YOU COPS OR SOMETHING?
THERE'S SOMETHING IN THERE--IT KILLED MY FRIEND, AND--AND THEN SOMETHING ELSE--
WE KNOW, MA'AM. IT'S ALL GOOD.
WE'RE HANDLING IT.
BDAM
SPAK
QUICK AND CLEAN.
AGENT HURST TO SHADOW BASE. CIVILIAN ATTEMPTED EVAC, BUT THE PERIMETER REMAINS SECURE. OVER.
AGENT HURST, WAS IT?
OH. OH GOD.
JACKIE McGEE. I'M WITH THE ARIZONA HERALD.
THIS IS ME.

THIS IS ME.

WE HAVE SOME QUESTIONS.

YOU.

KILLED HER.

WHY?

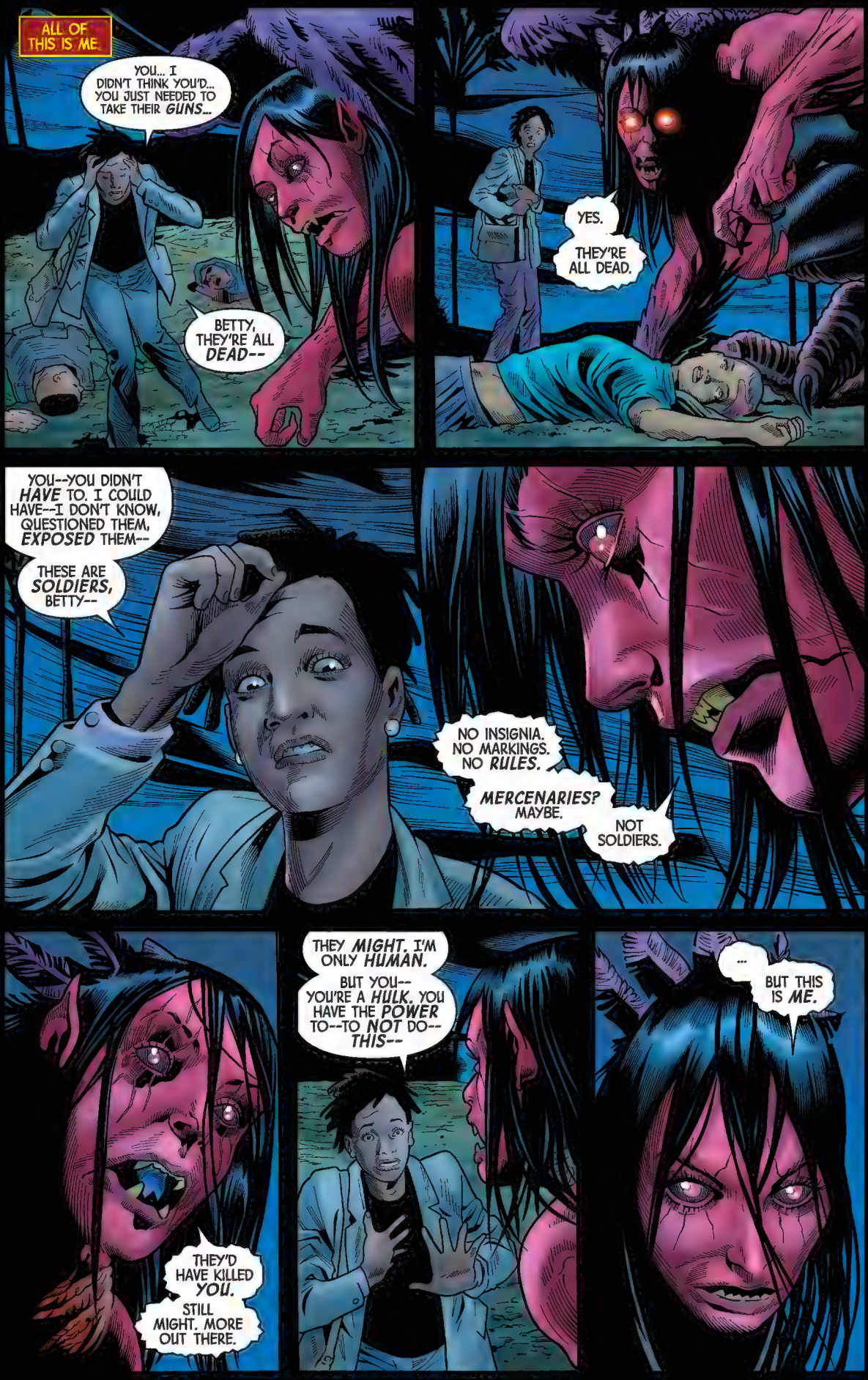
ORDERS.

BDAH BDAH BDAH BDAH

AND I AM NOT KIND.

I AM NOT ENDLESSLY LOVING.
HANDLER TEAM--I'M HEARING GUNSHOTS--
MONITORS ONE AND TWO, FOCUS ON HANDLER TEAM'S LOCATION, PLEASE--
I--
I WAS ONLY--
BDAM BDAM
NOT ENDLESSLY FORGIVING.
ONLY
I AM NOT YOUR SOUL MATE.
AARRGH--
NOT YOUR FRIEND.
WAIT-- STOP--
JUST THE GUNS--
I AM NOT FOR YOU AT ALL.
NO! PLEASE!
YOU JUST.
YOU JUST NEED TO TAKE THEIR GUNS.

I AM NOT THE WIND BENEATH YOUR WINGS.
GET BACK! GET AWAY FROM ME!
YOU'RE A MONSTER!
BECAUSE I HAVE WINGS OF MY OWN.
YOU'RE A--
AND FANGS.
AND TALONS.
GENERAL... WE...
...WE HAVE A PROBLEM...
AND THIS,
IS ME.
ALL OF THIS.


ALL OF THIS IS ME.
YOU... I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D... YOU JUST NEEDED TO TAKE THEIR GUNS...
BETTY, THEY'RE ALL DEAD--
YES.
THEY'RE ALL DEAD.
YOU--YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO. I COULD HAVE--I DON'T KNOW, QUESTIONED THEM, EXPOSED THEM--
THESE ARE SOLDIERS, BETTY--
NO INSIGNIA. NO MARKINGS. NO RULES.
MERCENARIES? MAYBE.
NOT SOLDIERS.
THEY'D HAVE KILLED YOU.
STILL MIGHT. MORE OUT THERE.
THEY MIGHT. I'M ONLY HUMAN.
BUT YOU-- YOU'RE A HULK. YOU HAVE THE POWER TO--TO NOT DO-- THIS--
...
BUT THIS IS ME.

AND YOU...YOU WATCH. YOU FOLLOW. QUESTION AND JUDGE.
YOU WANT TO KNOW. BUT DON'T WANT TO KNOW.
THAT'S YOU.
FOLLOWING NOW?
MORE OUT THERE.
I...WHAT YOU'VE DONE...
I CAN'T, I...
...I FEEL SICK.
...
SEND IN REINFORCEMENTS. I WANT THE PERIMETER LOCKED DOWN COMPLETELY. AND TELL THEM...
...TELL THEM WE'LL NEED AIR SUPPORT.

AND THIS IS ME.
HOLY MARY.
MOTHER OF GOD.
OH DADDY, DON'T BE SO UNFAIR! DR. BRUCE BANNER IS ONE OF OUR MOST FAMOUS SCIENTISTS!
I'M SURE HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING!
AND THIS IS ME.
PRAY FOR US SINNERS.
BRUCE! GO AWAY! LEAVE ME ALONE!
I HATE YOU!
I HATE YOU!
AND THIS IS ME.
N-NOW.
AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH.
REMEMBER "FOR BETTER OR WORSE"? IT NEVER GETS BETTER, BRUCE. NEVER.
JUST WORSE AND WORSE.
...
AMEN.

AND IF I AM HARD AND SHARP AND RAW.
IF I AM BLOODY IF I AM VENGEFUL.
IF I AM TO YOU A MONSTER.
THEN I AM ONLY A PROPER FIT FOR THIS WORLD.
HHSSS
HH... HULK...
H-HULK HURTS.
THIS WORLD YOU MADE.
...THE ACID TAKES TIME TO BUILD UP, GENERAL.
SUBJECT B NEEDS TO FEED BEFORE HE CAN PRODUCE--
WILKINS--THE SCREEN.
SHE'S FOUND THEM.
WHAT SHE'S BECOME. THE WEAPON SHE'S BECOME.
INCREDIBLE.

SNFF
I KNOW YOU. IN THERE.
THE BOY-MAN.
HELP ME.
KILL.
YOU.
SIR--THE HULK WAS THE PRIMARY TARGET, BUT THE ABOMINATION CAN STILL--
SHH. WAIT.
THESE AREN'T THE GAMMA MUTATES WE KNOW, WILKINS. THIS...THIS IS THE NEXT STAGE.
LOOK AT HER.
WE HAVE TO SEE.
WE HAVE TO SEE WHAT SHE'LL DO.
B-BETTY?
HULK...HEARD BETTY'S VOICE. S-SOUNDED STRANGE.
WHAT... WHAT IS BETTY DOING?

HULK CAN'T SEE. HULK HURTS.
BETTY... BETTY IS FRIEND...
HELP HULK.
HELP-- HARRGH!
"THE BUTTERFLY CAN'T GET FREE...
"WITHOUT BREAKING THE WEB..."
GOOD.
I HOPE IT DOES.
WHAT IS BETTY DOING?
BETTY! HELP HULK!
HELP HULK!

INCREDIBLE.

OH GOD.

OH DEAR GOD.

BUT.

BUT BETTY IS *FRIEND.*

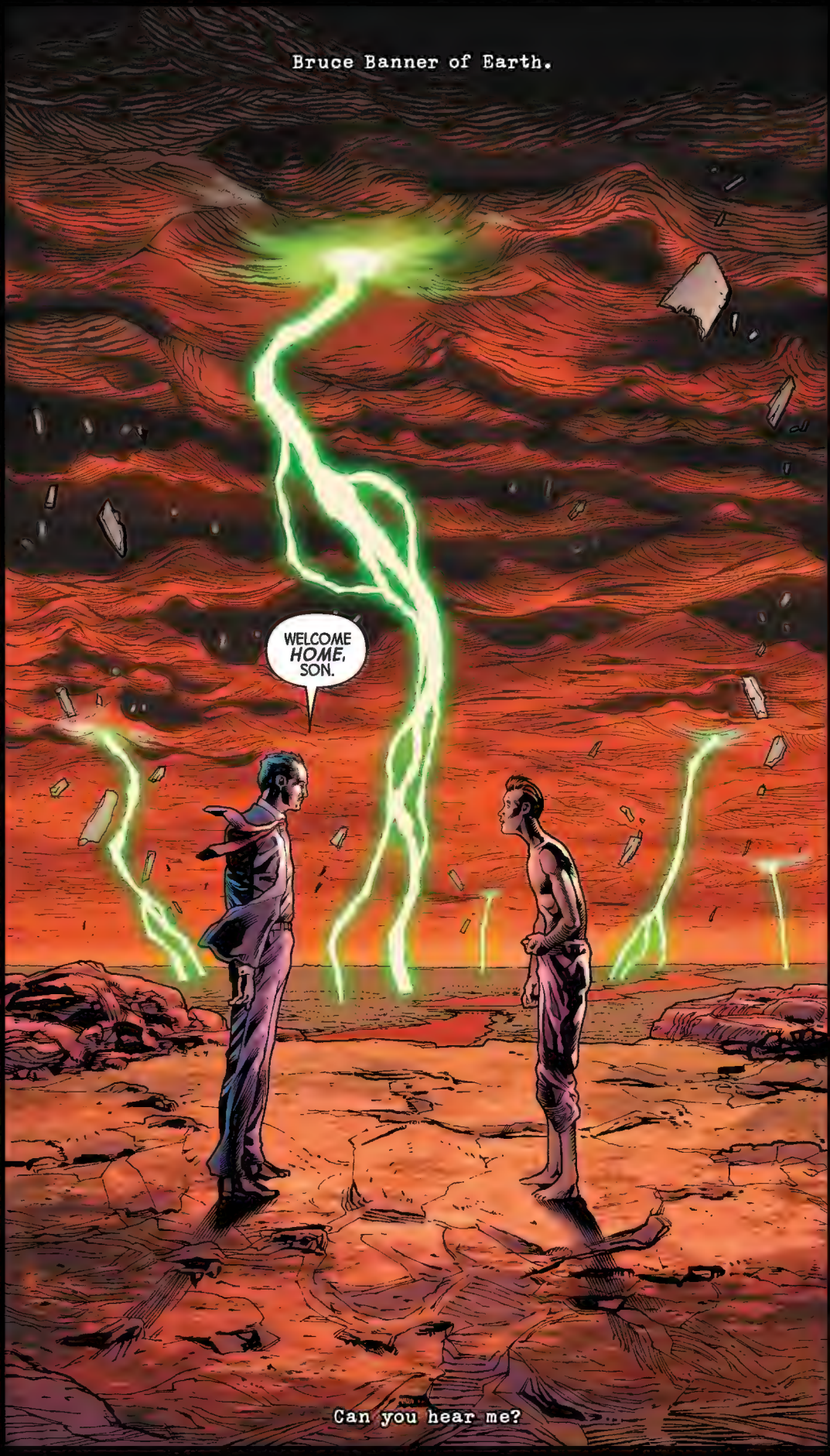
NO.

# BUTTERFLY

20

"THIS IS NOW THE HOUR OF DEATH AND REBIRTH."

– TIMOTHY LEARY
*THE PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE*


Bruce Banner of Earth.
WELCOME HOME, SON.
Can you hear me?

THE BELOW-PLACE.
DID I EVER REALLY LEAVE HERE?
WELL, IN ONE SENSE, NO, BRUCE, YOU NEVER HAVE. NOT SINCE THE BOMB KILLED YOU THAT FIRST TIME.
BUT IN ANOTHER SENSE, YOU'RE ALWAYS COMING AND GOING.
YOU AND THE OTHERS. IN AND OUT THROUGH THE GREEN DOOR...
WE'VE HAD CONVERSATIONS LIKE THIS BEFORE, MANY TIMES. YOU WON'T REMEMBER...
YOU THINK I DON'T?
YOU MANIPULATED ME--EVERYONE AROUND ME--TO SPLIT ME OFF FROM THE HULK, TO BIND ME TO--TO SOME COSMIC SATAN--
THE ONE BELOW ALL.
I AM MYSELF, BUT I AM ALSO HIM.
YOU REMEMBER THAT, BRUCE, BECAUSE THEN YOU DIDN'T COME TO US. WE HAD TO OPEN THE GREEN DOOR FROM YOUR SIDE.
WE CAME TO YOU.
BUT SOMETIMES THAT'S HOW YOU SHOW LOVE. AS A PARENT.
BY PUTTING IN THE EFFORT...

...
"THE OTHERS"...?
OH, YOU KNOW. THE DELINQUENT, THE QUACK, THE OLD GOAT, THE COPYCAT, MY SISTER'S IDIOT CHILD...
...YOUR WIFE...
BETTY WAS HERE...?
PASSING THROUGH. I TOLD YOU--THIS IS YOUR HOME. ALL OF YOU.
THIS IS WHERE YOU BELONG.
THIS...
...THIS IS WHERE GAMMA IS FROM.
ONE FORM OF IT, ANYWAY. THE HIDDEN FORM.
NOT A PARTICLE, NOT A WAVE...AN EMANATION.
THE EMANATION OF THE DIVINE.
GIVE OR TAKE.

NO. I--I REFUSE TO BELIEVE THAT.
GAMMA RADIATION IS--IT'S A MEASURABLE SCIENTIFIC PHENOMENON--
YOU'VE SAID THAT BEFORE, TOO.
AND YOU'RE RIGHT.
BUT FROM ANOTHER ANGLE--FROM ABOVE, OR BELOW--IT'S A MAGIC SPELL.
EVERYTHING IS MORE THAN ONE THING, BRUCE.
AM I A MAN YEARNING TO ESCAPE HELL? AM I A MONSTER WANTING TO BRING IT TO EARTH?
CAN'T YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, SEE THE MIDDLE GROUND?
SOMETIMES THERE ISN'T ONE. IF YOU'RE TRAPPED HERE? ALONE IN HELL?
I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE WHO DESERVES IT MORE.
OH, BRUCE.
MY SON. MY CLEVER BOY...
WHO SAID I WAS ALONE HERE?

...NO.
MOTHER?
SHE VISITS ME SOMETIMES.
NEVER FOR LONG.
MOTHER-- MOTHER, COME BACK--
DON'T EMBARRASS YOURSELF, BOY.
PLEASE-- JUST--
JUST TURN YOUR HEAD! JUST LOOK AT ME!
MOTHER!
Can you see me?

Do you know who I am?

MOTHER, PLEASE!

HELP ME!

HELP ME!

IT'S OKAY.

IT'S OKAY, KID.

I'VE GOT YOU.

I'VE ALWAYS GOT YOU.

WHAM

LEMME GUESS, BETTY, ONCE I WAS DEAD ALL THE WAY, HE STARTED ON YOU, RIGHT?
WE NEED TO WATCH OUT FOR THAT WEIRD STOMACH ACID OF HIS...
STOMACH ACID?
HHH... HH...
NO STOMACH.
NO ACID.
THAT WORKS. BUT GO EASY--- IT'S JONES UNDER THERE.
AND... ONE MORE THING.
HRR. JONES.
YES?
WHEN YOU KILLED ME... YOU HURT THE BIG GUY.
SHRRIPP
DON'T EVER DO THAT AGAIN.
... DON'T HURT ME AGAIN.
DEAL.
SO, McGEE. WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I... I'M...
...HULK...SHE KILLED YOU. YOU JUST SAID SHE KILLED YOU. SHE TORE OUT YOUR HEART AND ATE IT--
SURE. HARD RESET--KILLING ME JUMP-STARTED MY HEALING. HERE I AM.
WELCOME TO MY WORLD. ANSWER THE QUESTION.
...MY EDITOR.
HE WANTED THE STORY ON MRS. BANNER, ON WHAT HAPPENED BACK IN CALIFORNIA...AND...
...WELL, I FOUND OUT. AND...I WANTED THE STORY...
I BROUGHT HER WITH ME. SHE HAD QUESTIONS.
SHE DOESN'T LIKE THE ANSWERS.
NO, I DO NOT.
THAT DOESN'T FAZE YOU? THAT YOUR WIFE TURNED INTO--INTO THAT?
IT HAPPENS...
HRM.
WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF THE HULK, RIGHT?
IT'S LIKE THE MONKEY'S PAW. I WANTED TO KNOW--NOW I DO. AND I CAN'T STOP KNOWING.
LIKE I'M STILL TRAPPED IN HELL... AND THE ONLY WAY IS...
DOWN.

HUH? W-WHAT ARE YOU--

I SAID--

GENERAL FORTEAN-- THIS IS WAR WAGON ONE.

WE HAVE YOUR MONSTERS IN SIGHT, PLUS THE LOOSE END.

GIVE THE WORD, SIR.

THE WORD IS GIVEN, LIEUTENANT.

CAUTERIZE.

BRAKKUS

--DOWN!

YOU OKAY?
MY--MY EARS ARE RINGING, BUT... YEAH. I DON'T THINK ANYTHING'S BROKEN.
DID YOU JUST SAVE MY LIFE?
DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS.
THEY'RE COMING 'ROUND FOR ANOTHER PASS--
--AND WE STILL GOT THE JONES BOYS TO DEAL WITH.
K-K-K-K
HRR...
"THE STOMACH WOUND IS HEALING, SIR--"
--BUT HIS ACID ATTACK STILL ISN'T FUNCTIONAL.
BARE HANDS, THEN.
GO FOR THE HEAD--TEAR IT OFF AT THE NECK.
THERE'S SOME POETIC JUSTICE IN THAT...

BETTY--
BRAKKAKKAKKA
DAMN IT-- PINNED DOWN HERE--
BETTY! GIVE ME A SECOND--I CAN STILL--
NO.
YOU-- HRRK--YOU SEE TO THE HUMAN.
"JONES"...
...IS MINE.
"SHE'S IN THE AIR, SIR--"

--BUT THE ABOMINATION STILL HAS HER.
THEN SHE'S DEAD.
WHAT ABOUT THE HULK? WAR WAGONS--REPORT, PLEASE--
WAGON ONE HERE. BANNER'S STILL PROTECTING THE REPORTER, SIR.
K-K-KUH--
GOOD. WAGON TWO--CIRCLE AROUND AND DEPLOY U.V. DRONES.
WITH ENOUGH ARTIFICIAL SUNLIGHT, WE CAN TRIGGER THE CHANGE--
KILL
ME
--AND THEN KILL THEM BOTH.
SHRRIP
ALL RIGHT.
THIS IS WAGON TWO, GENERAL--COMING IN FOR APPROACH NOW--
--DEPLOYING DAYLIGHT IN THREE--
--TWO--
--ONE--

KRAM
HOLY--
WAGON TWO IS--IT'S ON FIRE, GENERAL! IT'S--IT'S HEADING RIGHT FOR--
HNH.
CATCH.
WHAM
NO--

WAGON ONE-- WAGON TWO-- REPORT STATUS, PLEASE--
WHAT-- WHAT JUST HAPPENED--?
HE... H-HE...
...HE PUNCHED ONE OF THEM INTO THE OTHER ONE.
SIR.
...YOU KNOW, AMADEUS CHO HAD A THEORY.
HE SAID BRUCE BANNER WAS ALWAYS SUBCONSCIOUSLY WORKING TO STOP YOU FROM KILLING ANYONE...
YEAH, I HEARD THAT ONE.
LITTLE SCREWY, BUT IT MAKES SENSE.
FOR THE OTHER HULKS.
WHERE'S JONES?

HE FELL.
HERE.
HH... HLLL...
KK-K...
YEAH, YEAH. I HEARD YOU THE *FIRST* TIME, JONES.
*HELP* YOU, *KILL* YOU...
LET'S SEE WHICH *THIS* DOES.
WRRUUNCH
HNH.
GUESS WE'LL *FIND OUT*...
HULK--
YEAH.
TIME WE WEREN'T HERE.
MONITOR TEAM IS REPORTING A *FLYING CRAFT* CROSSING THE PERIMETER, SIR...
AND I KNOW *WHOSE*.
ALL UNITS, *PULL BACK*-- REPEAT, *PULL BACK*. THAT'S A *DIRECT ORDER*--

"--FOR NOW, WE LEAVE GAMMA FLIGHT ALONE."
DEAR GOD.
WHAT HAPPENED HERE?
THE HULK HAPPENED, EH? ACCORDING TO THE SATELLITES, ANYWAY.
THE QUESTION IS, IS HE STILL AROUND?
TELL YOU WHAT IS AROUND-- A HELL OF A LOT OF RESIDUAL GAMMA. ANYONE STILL ALIVE, WE OUGHTA GET 'EM OUT FAST...
ABOMINATION.
NOBODY TOUCH THIS WITHOUT GLOVES.
I HEAR SIRENS. WE GOT CLEARANCE OR WHATEVER HERE, RIGHT?
ME AND CRUSHER, WE DON'T NEED MORE TROUBLE...
...NO.
NOBODY HERE NEEDS MORE TROUBLE.
HOTEL
HOTE
NOT YET.
Can you see me?

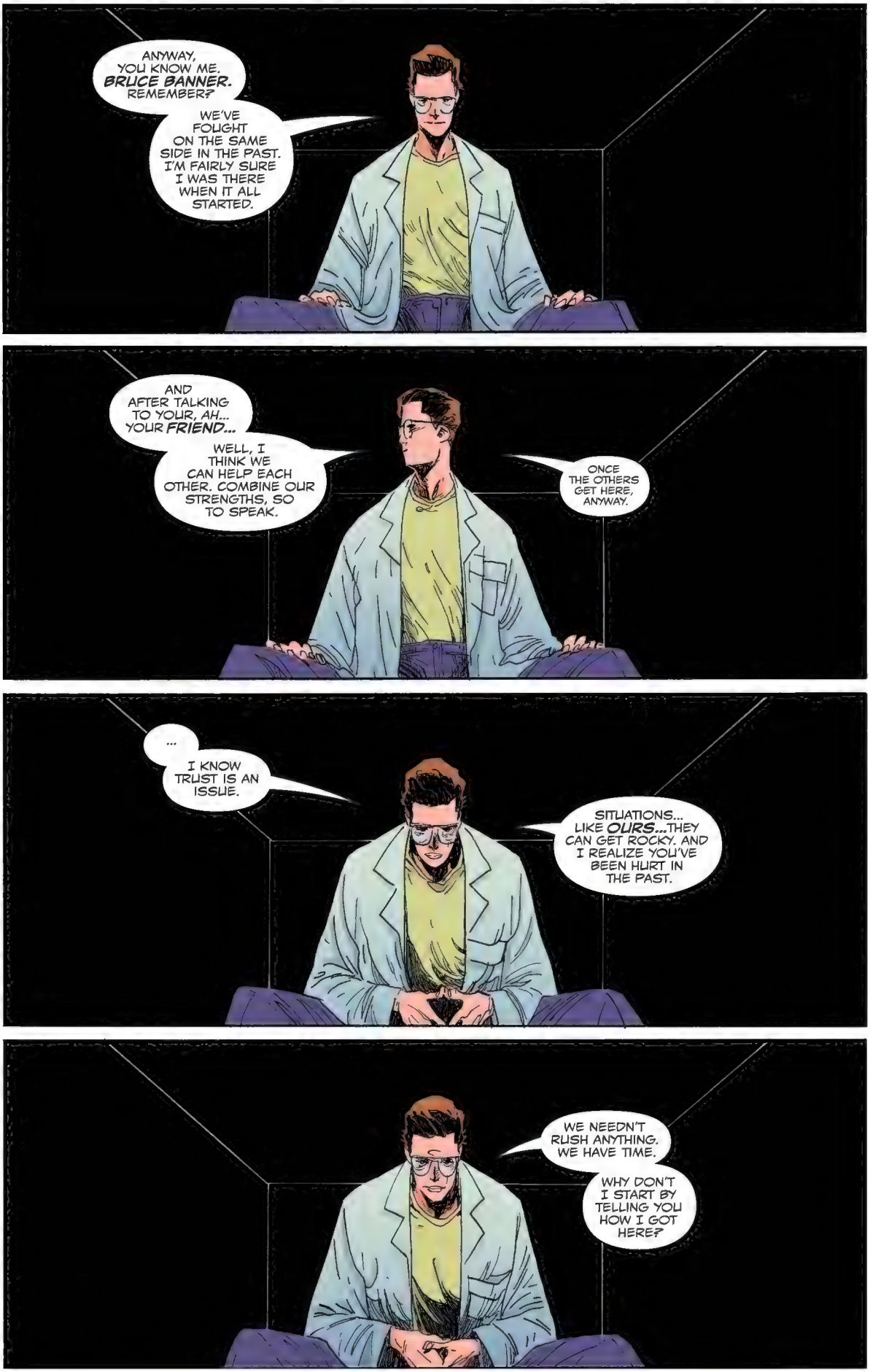
Do you know who I am?
Do you know who you are, Bruce Banner of Earth?
After everything that led you here.
After the horseman of war, in his nightmare armor.
After the steel throne and your awful decision.
After the beast of myth and the Hulk-that-was.
After the thing in the tube and the thoughtful man.
And after all the time that has passed.
What are you, at the end of all things?
Geburah or Golachab? The Man or the Monster?
What are you, Bruce Banner of Earth?

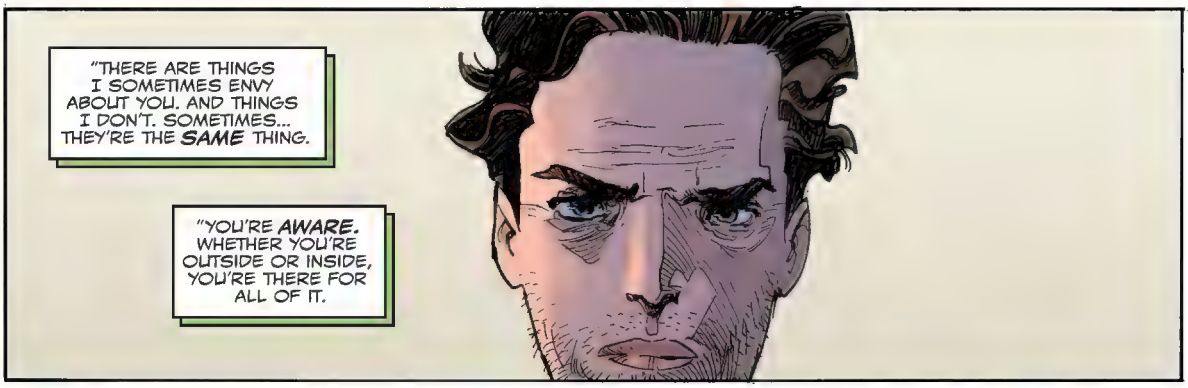
# Metatron

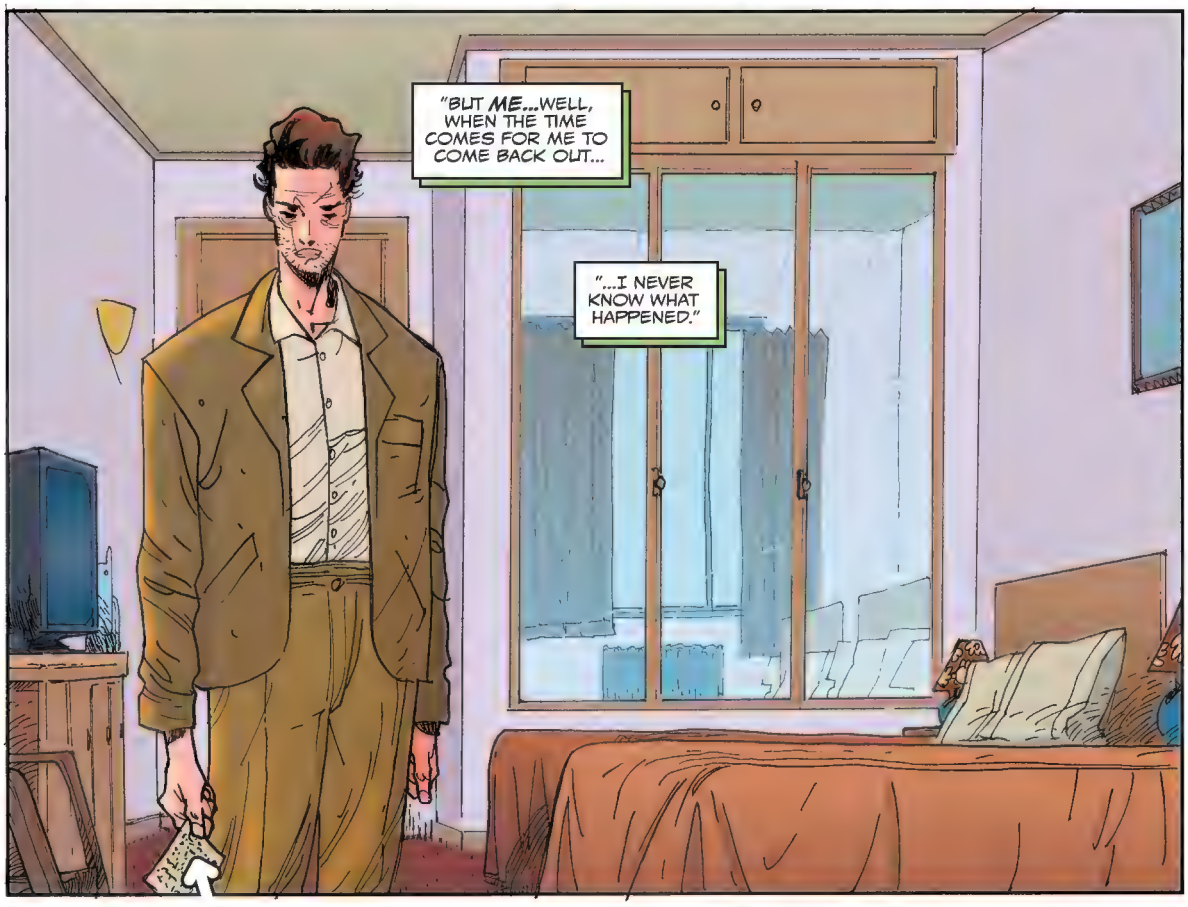
#1 VARIANT BY DALE KEOWN & JASON KEITH

**CLETUS KASADY**, THE SERIAL KILLER BONDED TO THE **CARNAGE SYMBIOTE**, IS ON THE HUNT FOR SMALL PIECES OF GENETIC MATERIAL — CALLED "CODICES" — LEFT IN THE SPINE OF ANY BEING WHO HAS BONDED WITH A SYMBIOTE. CARNAGE DOES THIS IN AN ATTEMPT TO FREE HIS GOD, KNULL, AND BRING CHAOS TO EARTH. BUT THE HULK HAS NEVER BEEN BONDED TO A SYMBIOTE...

YOU KNOW... IT'S ACTUALLY BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I'VE HAD A CONVERSATION LIKE THIS.
I GUESS I SHOULD THANK YOU FOR PROVIDING THE *VENUE*.


ANYWAY, YOU KNOW ME. BRUCE BANNER. REMEMBER?
WE'VE FOUGHT ON THE SAME SIDE IN THE PAST. I'M FAIRLY SURE I WAS THERE WHEN IT ALL STARTED.
AND AFTER TALKING TO YOUR, AH... YOUR FRIEND...
WELL, I THINK WE CAN HELP EACH OTHER. COMBINE OUR STRENGTHS, SO TO SPEAK.
ONCE THE OTHERS GET HERE, ANYWAY.
...
I KNOW TRUST IS AN ISSUE.
SITUATIONS... LIKE OURS...THEY CAN GET ROCKY. AND I REALIZE YOU'VE BEEN HURT IN THE PAST.
WE NEEDN'T RUSH ANYTHING. WE HAVE TIME.
WHY DON'T I START BY TELLING YOU HOW I GOT HERE?




BANNER - ROOM'S PAID FOR. MCGEE NEXT DOOR. DON'T BUG HER. BETTY + JONES IN BATHROOM. DON'T BUG THEM. YOU'RE TOO NEEDY. CLOTHES ARE YOUR SIZE, DON'T MESS 'EM UP. MORE IN WARDROBE, INCLUDING PRE-TORN. DEVIL SAYS LAY LOW FOR NOW. I'LL BE BACK IN 2 DAYS to SWITCH MOTELS UNLESS JONES WAKES UP.

JOE.

BETTY? ARE YOU IN THERE?
KNOCK KNOCK
YES?
I ONLY JUST CAME TO. DID--DID YOU HEAL FROM THE BULLET WOUND? WHAT EXACTLY IS GOING--
--ON?
YES. THIS IS ME.
WE'VE GOT RICK JONES. HE'S IN THE BATHTUB. GETTING BETTER, MAYBE.
JACKIE CAN TELL YOU MORE.
I--I--
SLAM!
BETTY?

"I DID SPEAK TO JACKIE McGEE EVENTUALLY. SHE GAVE ME THE FULL STORY--AS MUCH AS SHE'D SEEN.
"SHADOW BASE STOLE RICK'S CORPSE--THAT I KNEW. WHAT I DIDN'T KNOW WAS THAT THEY'D EXPERIMENTED ON HIM--TURNED HIM INTO AN ABOMINATION.
"THEY SENT HIM AFTER ME. BETTY AND MS. McGEE BECAME INVOLVED. IT GOT... UNPLEASANT.
"EVENTUALLY HULK TORE RICK FREE OF THE ABOMINATION'S SHELL. SINCE THEN, HE'S BEEN...WELL, DEAD IS THE WRONG WORD FOR PEOPLE LIKE US.
"RECUPERATING.
"ANYWAY. RIGHT THEN THOUGH, I WAS PUTTING OFF TALKING TO HER. SHE'S A REPORTER, AFTER ALL--SPEAKING RATIONALLY, IT'S HARD TO SEE WHY THE HULKS TRUST HER SO MUCH.
"ACCORDING TO THE MOTEL STATIONERY, WE WERE IN CALIFORNIA.
BIP
"I FIGURED I COULD GET THE CONTEXT I NEEDED FROM THE LOCAL NEWS.

"I GOT SOMETHING ELSE.

--IN NATIONAL NEWS--A BIZARRE ACT OF ***DESECRATION*** AT A MILITARY GRAVESITE.

WE WEREN'T ALLOWED TO FILM IN WEST POINT CEMETERY ITSELF, BUT ROXX NEWS WAS ABLE TO GET THIS AERIAL FOOTAGE.

DOZENS OF GRAVES VANDALIZED IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT. SPREAD ACROSS THE WRECKED HEADSTONES, A SICKLY ***RED SLIME***--POTENTIALLY SOME UNKNOWN BIOLOGICAL WEAPON.

WAS THIS AN ACT OF TERROR? A LIBERAL PROTEST AGAINST OUR MILITARY?

ROXX NEWS

OR SOMETHING EVEN ***WORSE?***

ONE BODY HAS BEEN CONFIRMED AS MISSING FROM THE SCENE--A HERO OF OUR COUNTRY, A PROUD SERVANT OF OUR GOVERNMENT. AN ***AVENGER.***

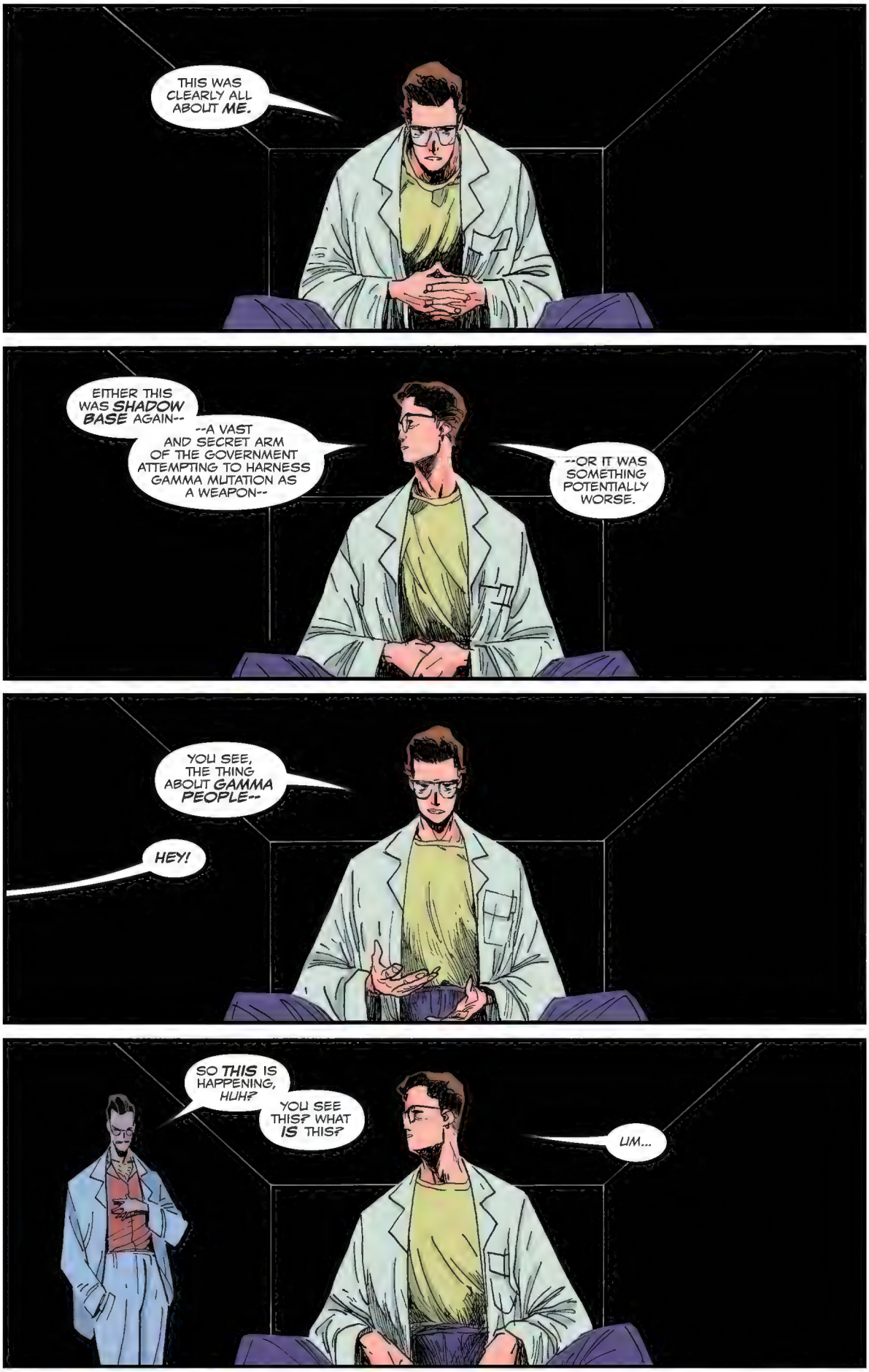
THE BODY OF ***GENERAL THADDEUS "THUNDERBOLT" ROSS*** HAS BEEN--

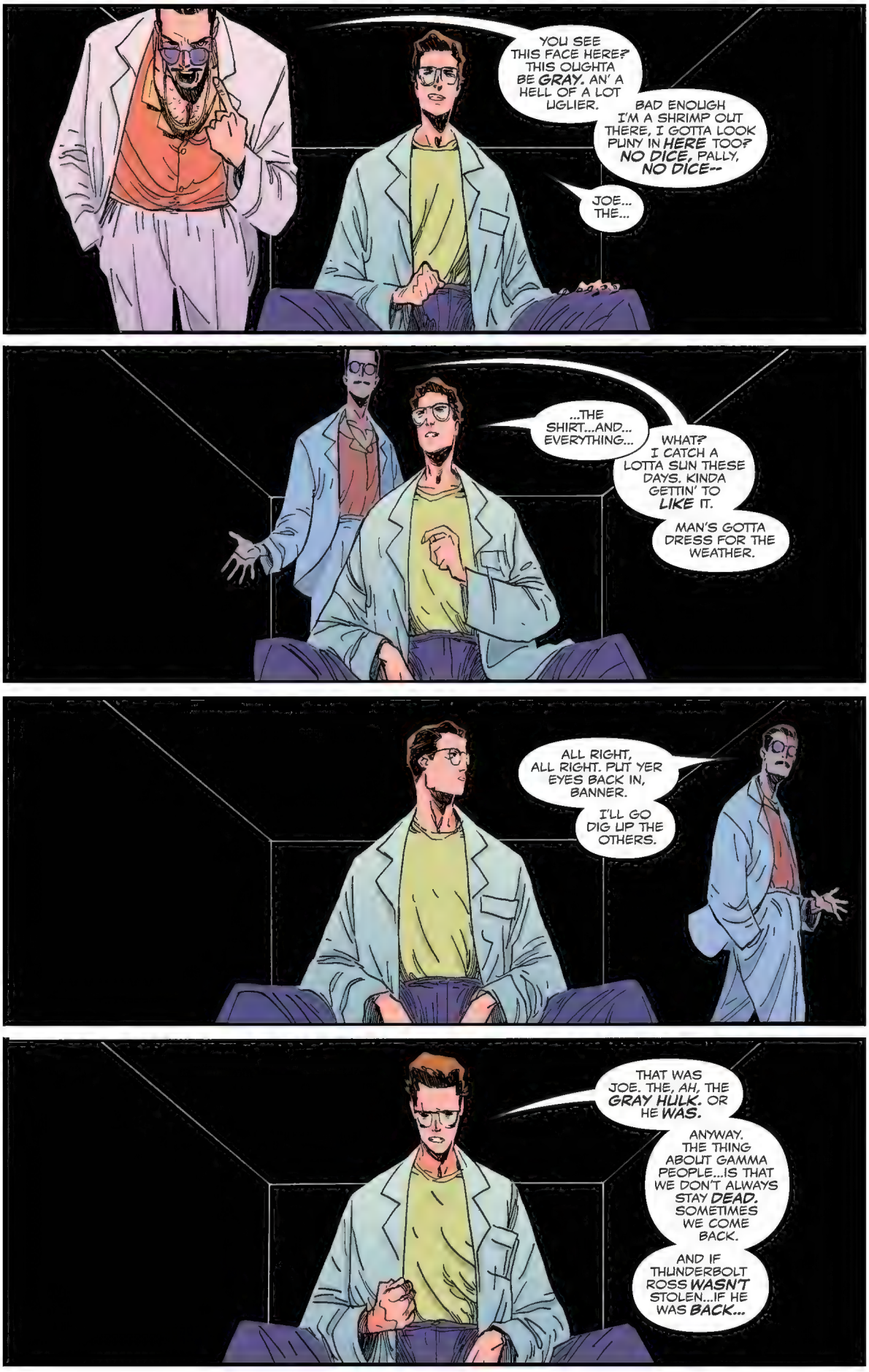
BZIIIU

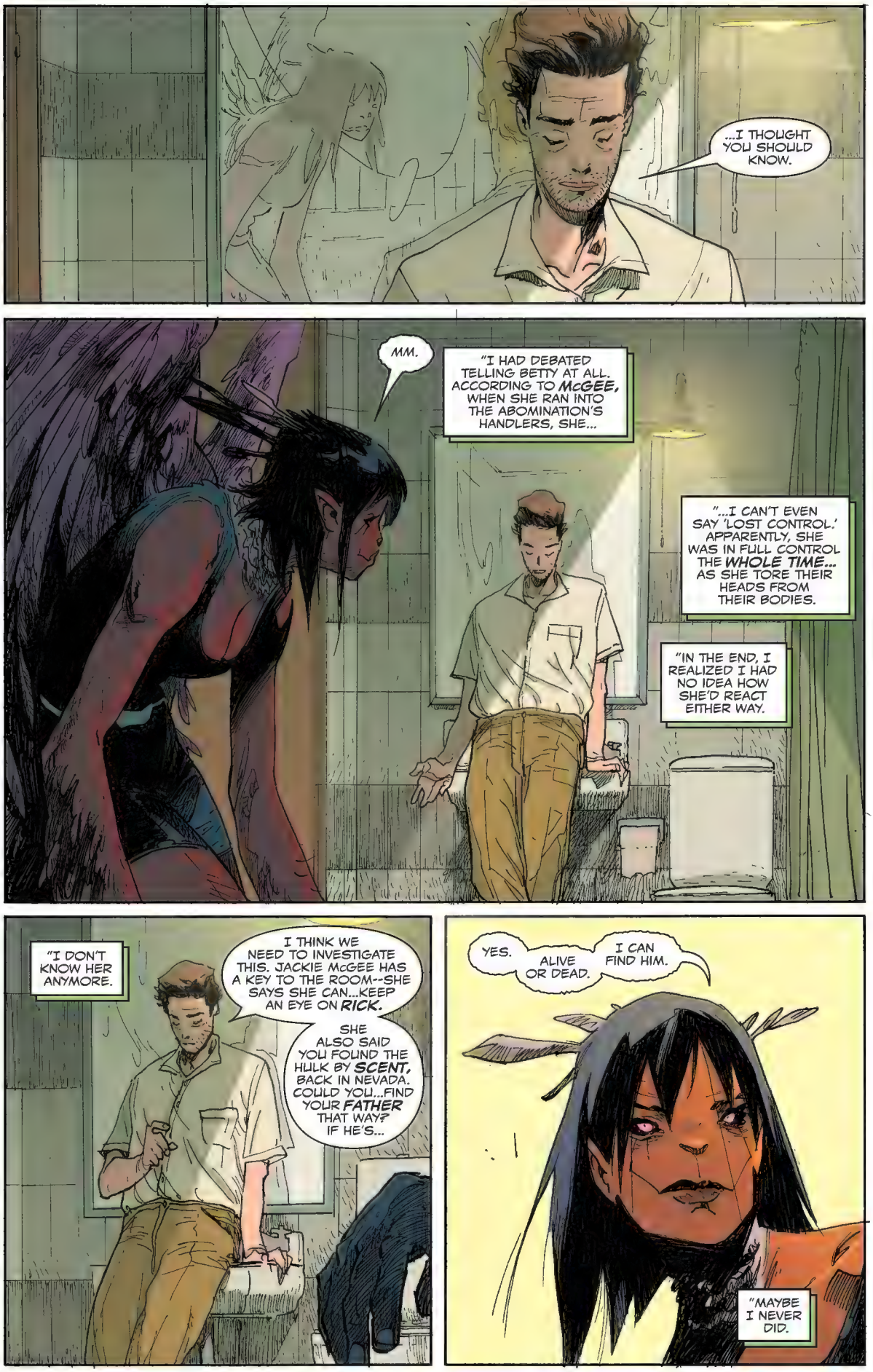
"THE STOLEN CORPSE OF A KNOWN GAMMA MUTATE. JUST AS RICK'S HAD BEEN STOLEN.

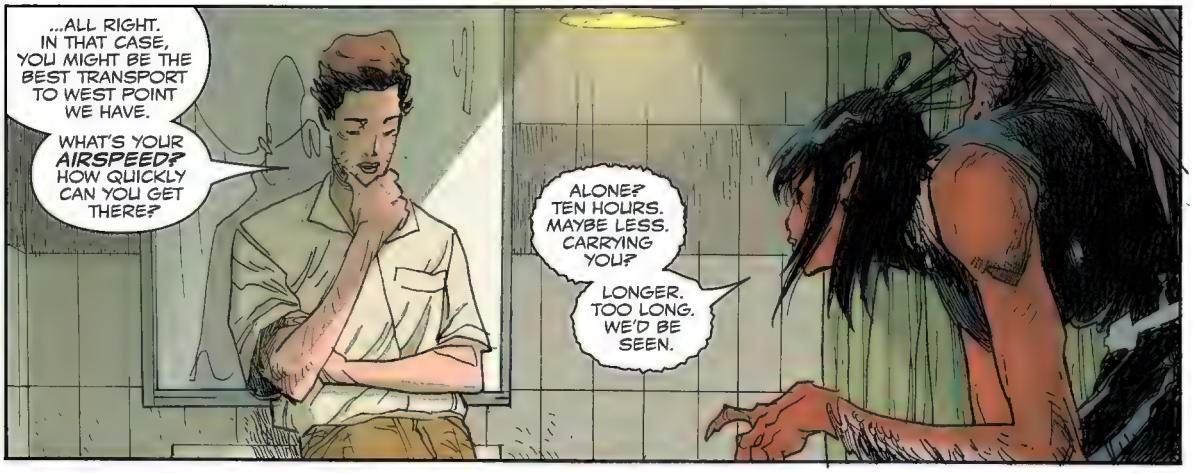
"THERE WAS EVEN RED BIO-MATTER AT THE SCENE--RED FOR THE RED HULK. ROSS' MUTATION.

"THERE WAS ONLY ***ONE*** CONCLUSION I COULD POSSIBLY COME TO."


THIS WAS CLEARLY ALL ABOUT ME.
EITHER THIS WAS SHADOW BASE AGAIN--
--A VAST AND SECRET ARM OF THE GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTING TO HARNESS GAMMA MUTATION AS A WEAPON--
--OR IT WAS SOMETHING POTENTIALLY WORSE.
YOU SEE, THE THING ABOUT GAMMA PEOPLE--
HEY!
SO THIS IS HAPPENING, HUH?
YOU SEE THIS? WHAT IS THIS?
UM...

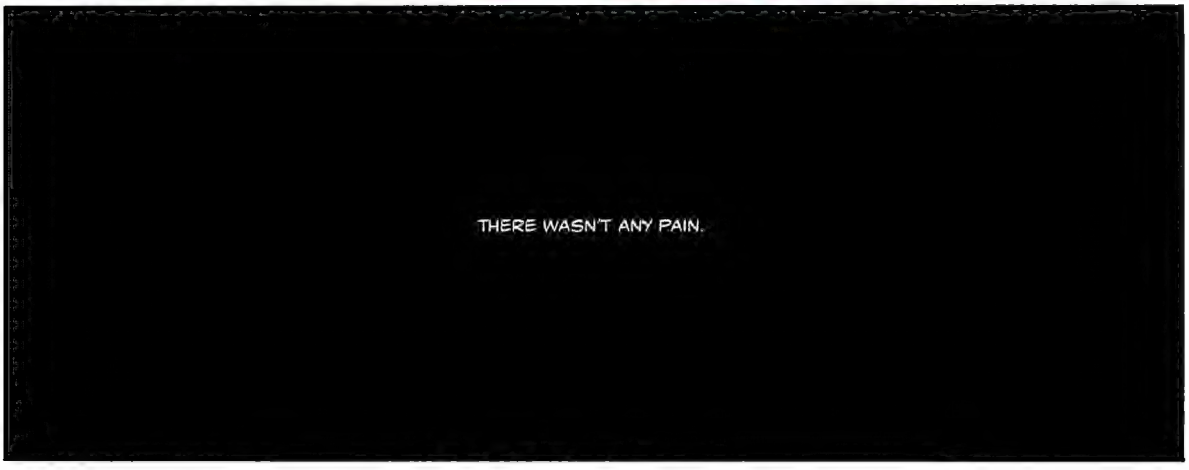

YOU SEE THIS FACE HERE? THIS OUGHTA BE GRAY. AN' A HELL OF A LOT UGLIER.
BAD ENOUGH I'M A SHRIMP OUT THERE, I GOTTA LOOK PUNY IN HERE TOO? NO DICE, PALLY, NO DICE--
JOE... THE...
...THE SHIRT...AND... EVERYTHING...
WHAT? I CATCH A LOTTA SUN THESE DAYS. KINDA GETTIN' TO LIKE IT.
MAN'S GOTTA DRESS FOR THE WEATHER.
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT. PUT YER EYES BACK IN, BANNER.
I'LL GO DIG UP THE OTHERS.
THAT WAS JOE. THE, AH, THE GRAY HULK. OR HE WAS.
ANYWAY. THE THING ABOUT GAMMA PEOPLE...IS THAT WE DON'T ALWAYS STAY DEAD. SOMETIMES WE COME BACK.
AND IF THUNDERBOLT ROSS WASN'T STOLEN...IF HE WAS BACK...


...I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW.
MM.
"I HAD DEBATED TELLING BETTY AT ALL. ACCORDING TO McGEE, WHEN SHE RAN INTO THE ABOMINATION'S HANDLERS, SHE...
"...I CAN'T EVEN SAY 'LOST CONTROL.' APPARENTLY, SHE WAS IN FULL CONTROL THE WHOLE TIME... AS SHE TORE THEIR HEADS FROM THEIR BODIES.
"IN THE END, I REALIZED I HAD NO IDEA HOW SHE'D REACT EITHER WAY.
"I DON'T KNOW HER ANYMORE.
I THINK WE NEED TO INVESTIGATE THIS. JACKIE McGEE HAS A KEY TO THE ROOM--SHE SAYS SHE CAN...KEEP AN EYE ON RICK.
SHE ALSO SAID YOU FOUND THE HULK BY SCENT, BACK IN NEVADA. COULD YOU...FIND YOUR FATHER THAT WAY? IF HE'S...
YES.
ALIVE OR DEAD.
I CAN FIND HIM.
"MAYBE I NEVER DID.


...ALL RIGHT. IN THAT CASE, YOU MIGHT BE THE BEST TRANSPORT TO WEST POINT WE HAVE.
WHAT'S YOUR *AIRSPEED?* HOW QUICKLY CAN YOU GET THERE?
ALONE? TEN HOURS. MAYBE LESS. CARRYING YOU?
LONGER. TOO LONG. WE'D BE SEEN.

...
WHAT IF... YOU...
WHAT IF YOU FOLDED ME UP SMALL?
"SHE SAID NOTHING TO THAT. BUT SHE UNDERSTOOD.
"IT WAS EARLY MORNING. A GOOD TWELVE HOURS BEFORE THE SUN SET AND THE HULK ROSE. THE JOURNEY WOULD BE EASIER IF I... WASN'T THERE.

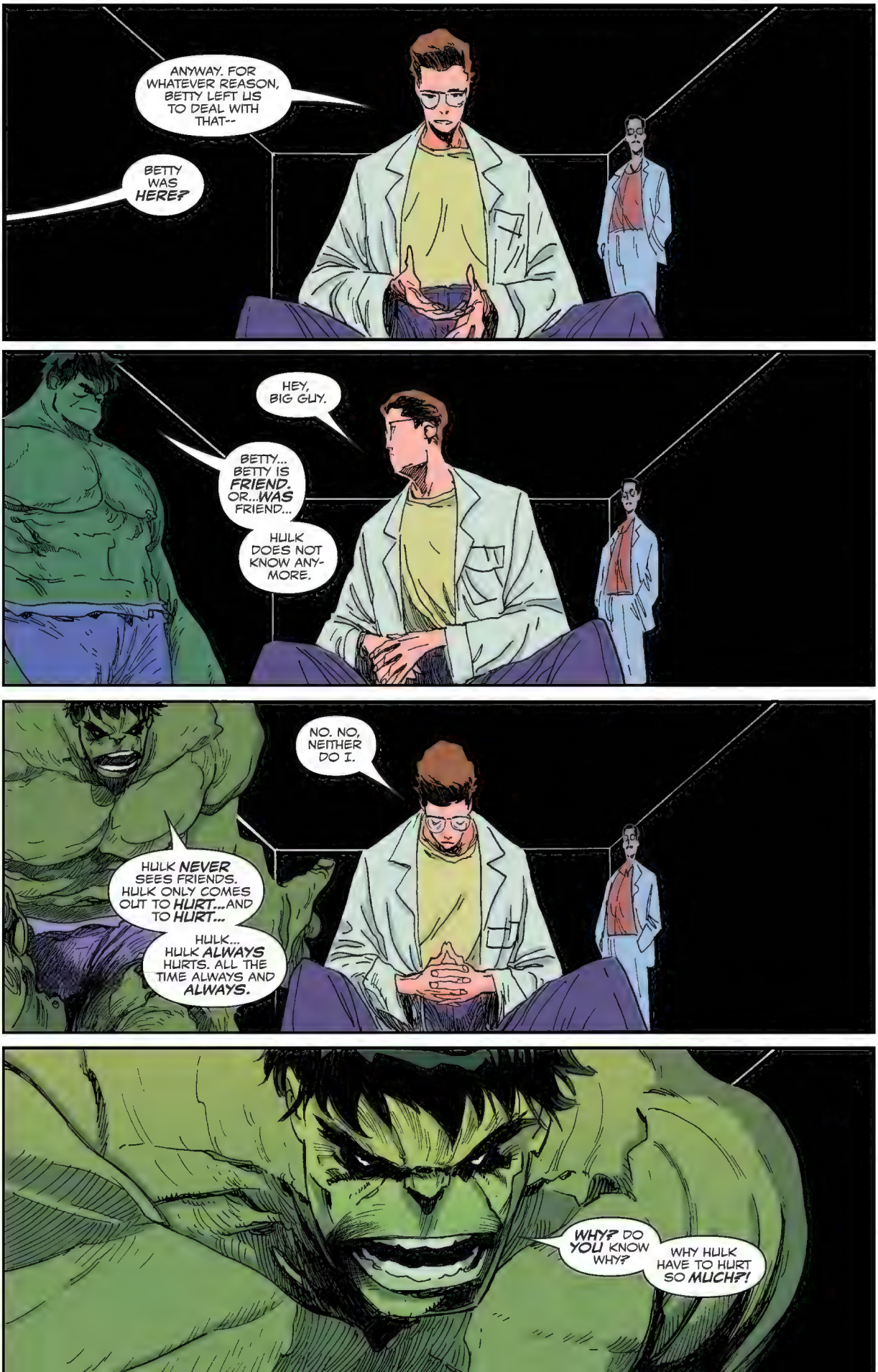
"SHE TOOK MY FACE IN HER HANDS, ALMOST GENTLY. I HOPED SHE WOULDN'T MAKE A MESS.


THERE WASN'T ANY PAIN.

"I NEVER REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I'M DEAD.
"MAYBE I SHOULD.
MAYBE IT'S IMPORTANT.
OH, BRUCE.
SHE JUST KEEPS KILLING YOU, DOESN'T SHE?
AND USUALLY I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT THE HULK DOES EITHER. WHILE I'M DEAD OR...AWAY. I TOLD YOU THAT, DIDN'T I?
BUT THIS TIME...

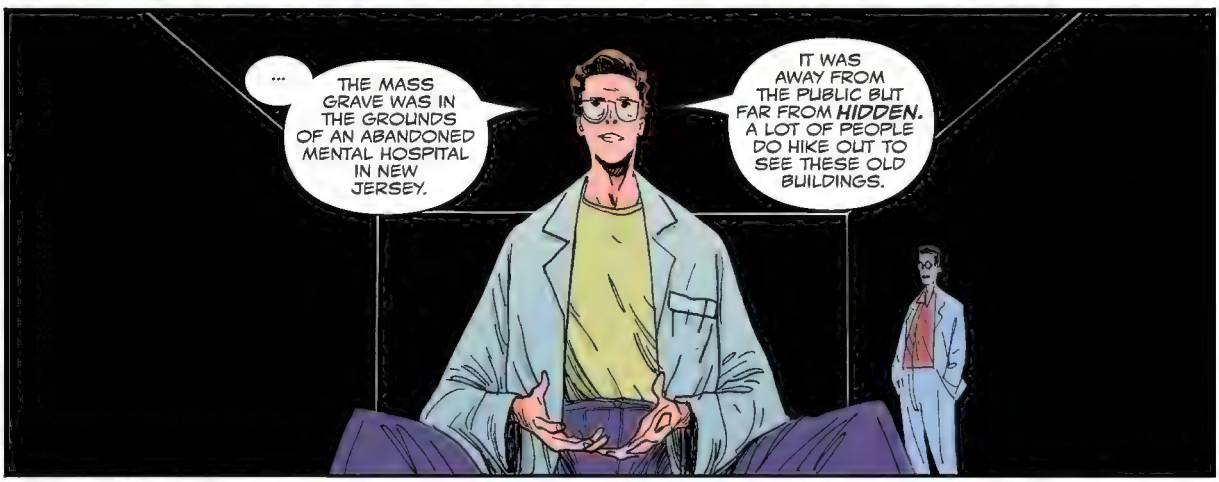
"THIS TIME, HE LET ME REMEMBER.
HNNH!
"THE CHANGE PROBABLY HURT MUCH MORE THAN USUAL. I WAS FOLDED UP SMALL, AFTER ALL. AND THE HULK IS VERY BIG.
"IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE AN AIRBAG INFLATING.
OW.
DAMMIT, BETTY...
"BETTY WAS ALREADY GONE.
"OUR BEST GUESS IS THAT SHE FLEW US TO WEST POINT, GOT HER FATHER'S SCENT FROM HIS GRAVE--
"--AND THEN TRACKED HIM TO WHERE HE WAS NOW.
ROSS...?
"I DON'T KNOW WHY SHE DIDN'T STAY. MAYBE SHE WAS SATISFIED WITH THE ANSWER. MAYBE SHE NEEDED TO BE ALONE.
"MAYBE SHE JUST DIDN'T CARE ABOUT WHAT SHE'D FOUND...

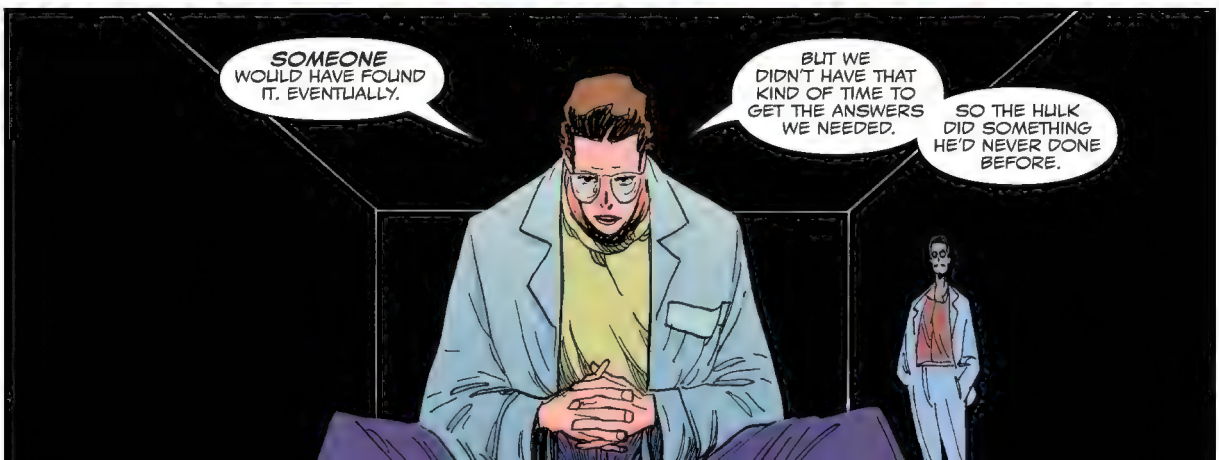
"...BUT I FIND THAT HARD TO BELIEVE."


ANYWAY. FOR WHATEVER REASON, BETTY LEFT US TO DEAL WITH THAT--
BETTY WAS *HERE?*
HEY, BIG GUY.
BETTY... BETTY IS *FRIEND.* OR...*WAS* FRIEND...
HULK DOES NOT KNOW ANY-MORE.
NO. NO, NEITHER DO I.
HULK *NEVER* SEES FRIENDS. HULK ONLY COMES OUT TO *HURT*...AND TO *HURT*...
HULK... HULK *ALWAYS* HURTS. ALL THE TIME ALWAYS AND *ALWAYS.*
*WHY?* DO *YOU* KNOW WHY?
WHY HULK HAVE TO HURT SO *MUCH?!*

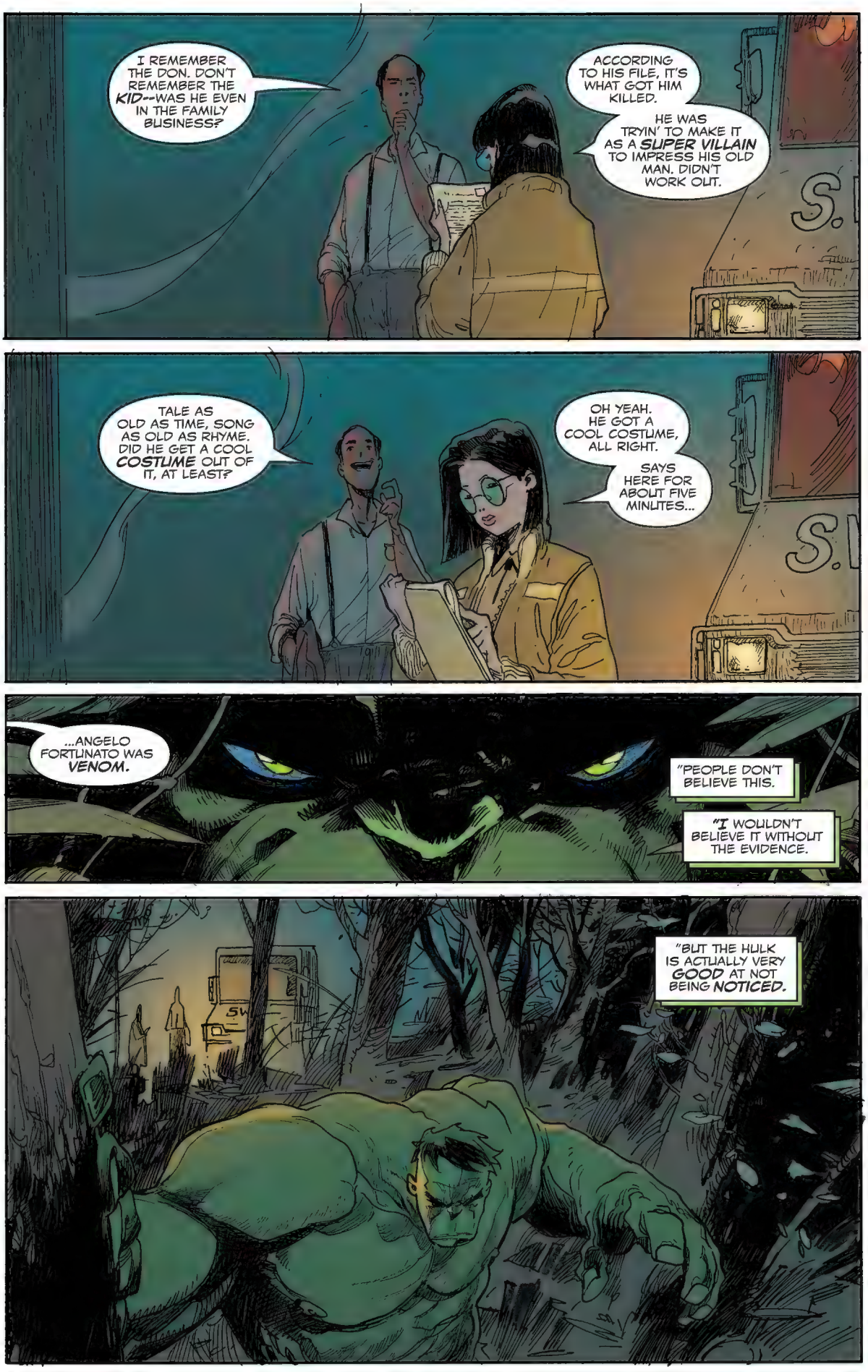
WELL... PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ASKING THAT QUESTION SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME, HULK--
BAH!
STUPID BANNER! STUPID BANNER KNOWS NOTHING!

STUPID BANNER TURNED BETTY INTO NOT-FRIEND! STUPID, PUNY BANNER!
I--I DON'T THINK I CAN BE BLAMED FOR--
STUPID BANNER!

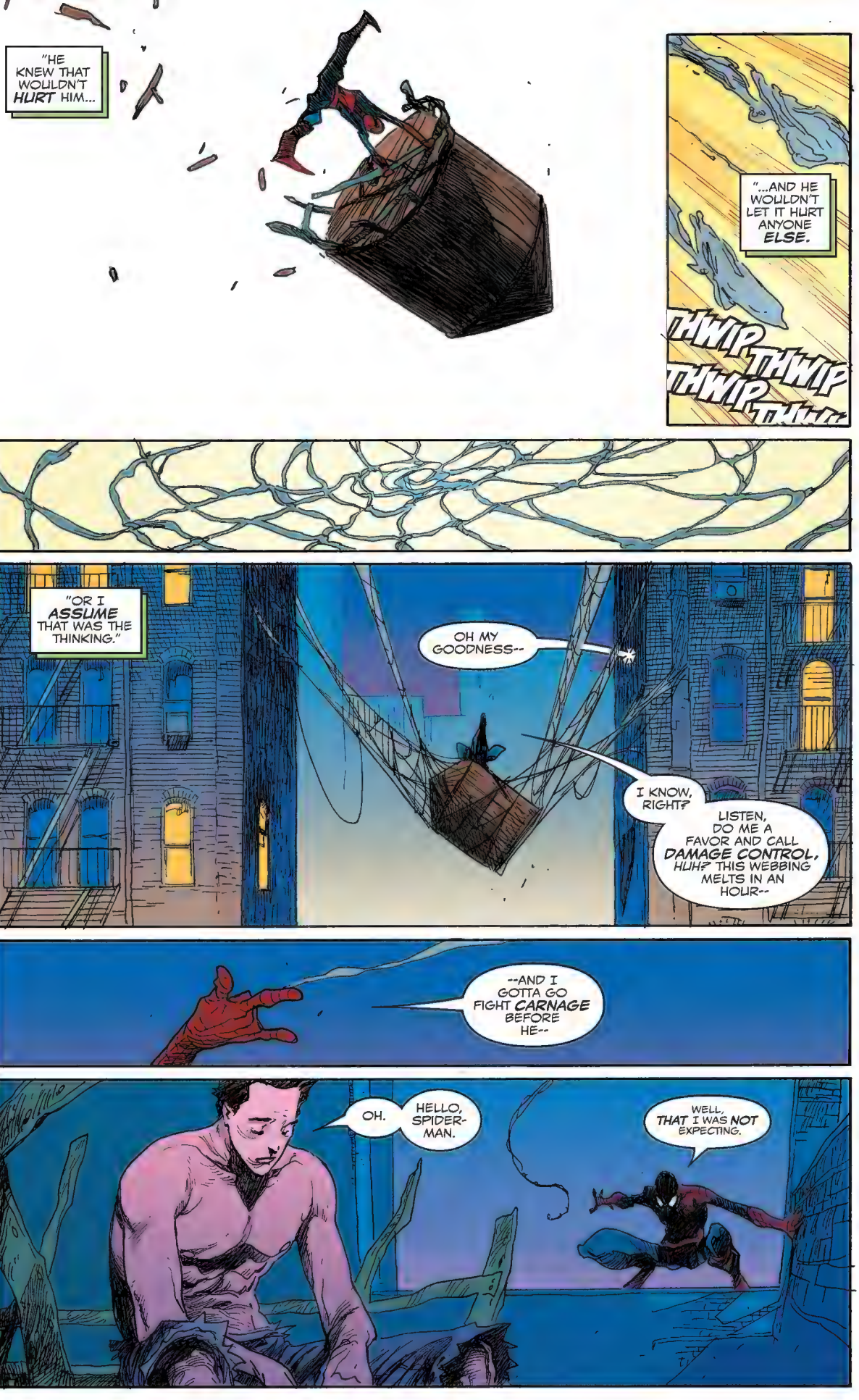

...
THE MASS GRAVE WAS IN THE GROUNDS OF AN ABANDONED MENTAL HOSPITAL IN NEW JERSEY.
IT WAS AWAY FROM THE PUBLIC BUT FAR FROM HIDDEN. A LOT OF PEOPLE DO HIKE OUT TO SEE THESE OLD BUILDINGS.

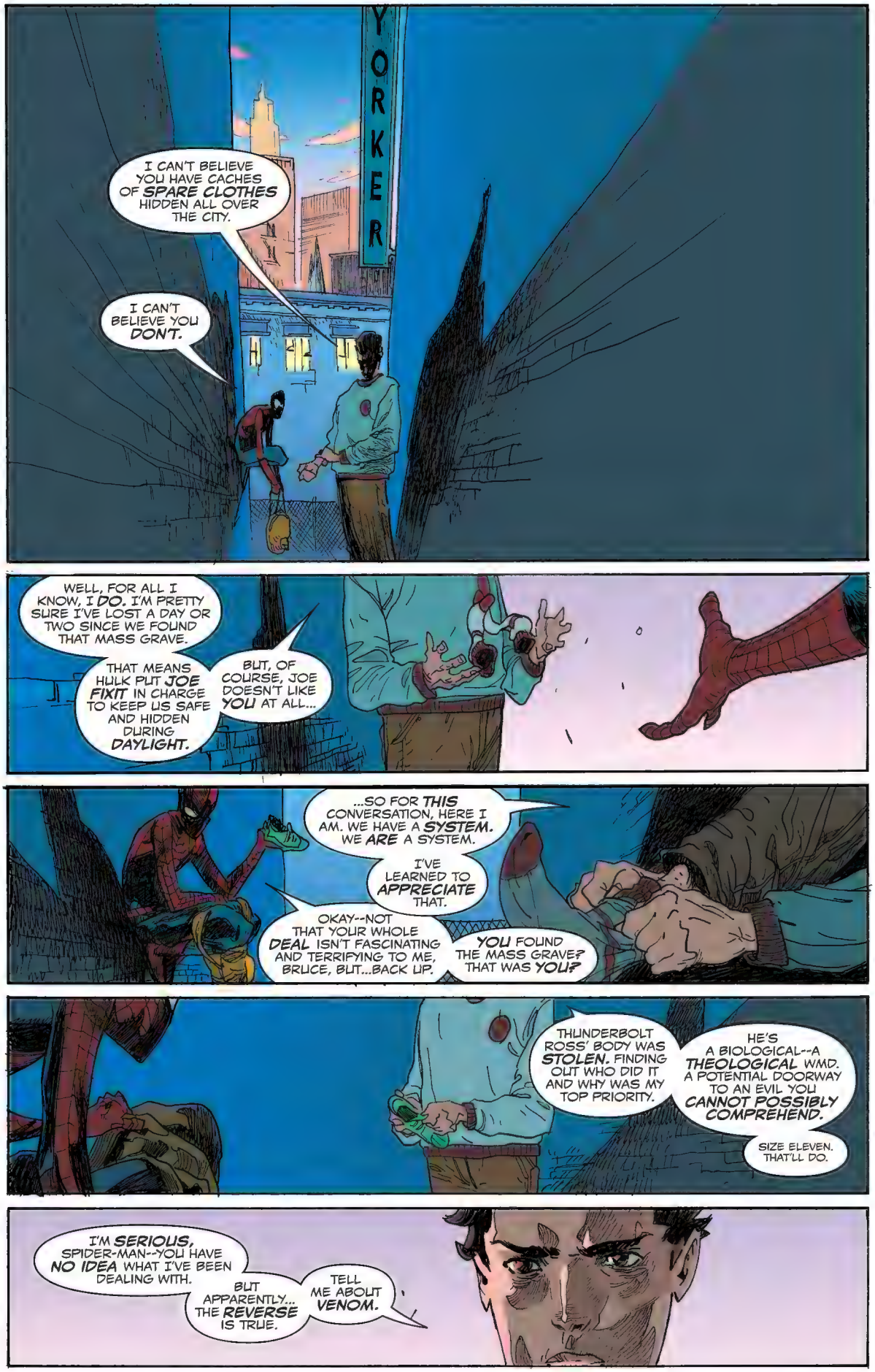

SOMEONE WOULD HAVE FOUND IT. EVENTUALLY.
BUT WE DIDN'T HAVE THAT KIND OF TIME TO GET THE ANSWERS WE NEEDED.
SO THE HULK DID SOMETHING HE'D NEVER DONE BEFORE.

"HE CALLED THE NEWS."
OUR TOP STORY TONIGHT-- AN ANONYMOUS TIP-OFF REVEALS A HORRIFIC SECRET LURKING IN NORTHERN NEW JERSEY.
VIEWERS ARE ADVISED THAT THE IMAGES CONTAINED IN THIS REPORT ARE EXTREMELY GRAPHIC IN NATURE--
"EXTREMELY GRAPHIC." YEAH, I'LL SAY. CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS CRAP?
STOLEN CORPSES WITH THEIR SPINES TORN OUT?
CELEBRITY CORPSES TOO.
SOME BIG-SHOT MILITARY GUYS ALREADY TOOK THUNDERBOLT ROSS OFF OUR HANDS...
GOOD. GREAT. I HOPE THEY TAKE THIS WHOLE MESS OFF OUR HANDS.
I MISS WHEN WE COULD BUMP CRAP LIKE THIS UP THE CHAIN TO S.H.I.E.L.D. OR WHOEVER, Y'KNOW?
I MEAN, WHERE ARE WE MEANT TO EVEN START WITH THIS?
...DIDN'T YOU SAY THERE WAS A MOBSTER'S KID IN THERE?
YEAH, I PULLED HIS JACKET. GOT IT HERE IF YOU WANNA SEE.
ANGELO FORTUNATO, SON OF DON FORTUNATO.

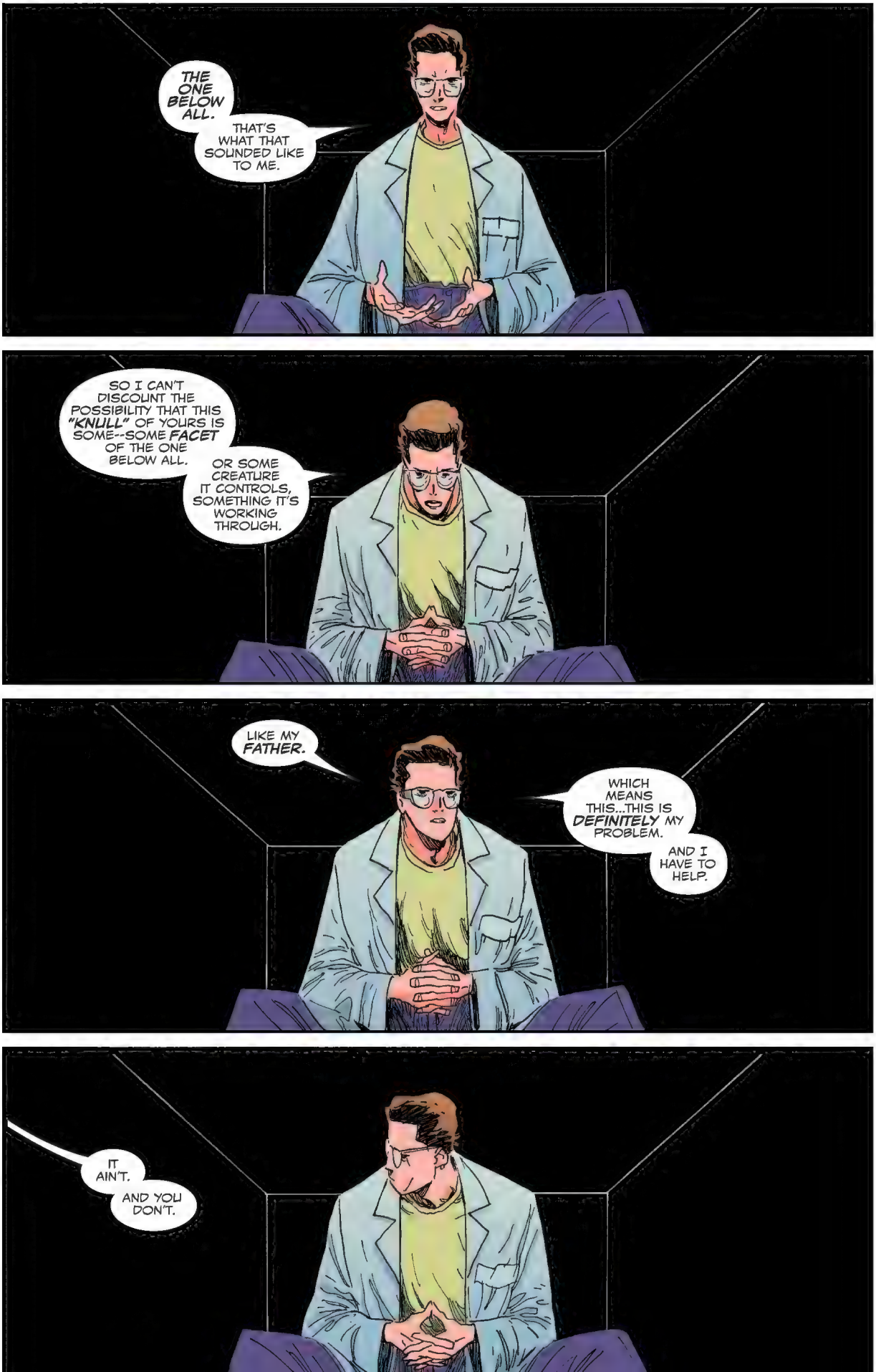

I REMEMBER THE DON. DON'T REMEMBER THE KID--WAS HE EVEN IN THE FAMILY BUSINESS?
ACCORDING TO HIS FILE, IT'S WHAT GOT HIM KILLED.
HE WAS TRYIN' TO MAKE IT AS A SUPER VILLAIN TO IMPRESS HIS OLD MAN. DIDN'T WORK OUT.
TALE AS OLD AS TIME, SONG AS OLD AS RHYME. DID HE GET A COOL COSTUME OUT OF IT, AT LEAST?
OH YEAH. HE GOT A COOL COSTUME, ALL RIGHT.
SAYS HERE FOR ABOUT FIVE MINUTES...
...ANGELO FORTUNATO WAS VENOM.
"PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE THIS.
"I WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT WITHOUT THE EVIDENCE.
"BUT THE HULK IS ACTUALLY VERY GOOD AT NOT BEING NOTICED.

"HE'S ALSO VERY GOOD AT BEING NOTICED.
OKAY. HEROES, HEROES, HEROES. HEROES WHO WERE VENOMS. WHO'S ON THE LIST?
I THINK CAP? SHOULD BRING HIM IN ON GENERAL PRINCIPLE. UM... WOLVERINE...HAWKEYE... MAYBE BEN GRIMM...
...CAN OF CHICKPEAS... NO, WAIT, THAT'S THE GROCERY LIST...
UGH. SUN'S JUST ABOUT TO COME UP.
I'M RUNNING OUT OF--
--TIME--
OBOY.
"HULK JUST WANTED SPIDER-MAN'S ATTENTION.


"HE KNEW THAT WOULDN'T HURT HIM...
"...AND HE WOULDN'T LET IT HURT ANYONE ELSE.
THWIP THWIP THWIP
"OR I ASSUME THAT WAS THE THINKING."
OH MY GOODNESS--
I KNOW, RIGHT?
LISTEN, DO ME A FAVOR AND CALL DAMAGE CONTROL, HUH? THIS WEBBING MELTS IN AN HOUR--
--AND I GOTTA GO FIGHT CARNAGE BEFORE HE--
OH.
HELLO, SPIDER-MAN.
WELL, THAT I WAS NOT EXPECTING.


YORKER
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU HAVE CACHES OF SPARE CLOTHES HIDDEN ALL OVER THE CITY.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU DON'T.
WELL, FOR ALL I KNOW, I DO. I'M PRETTY SURE I'VE LOST A DAY OR TWO SINCE WE FOUND THAT MASS GRAVE.
THAT MEANS HULK PUT JOE FIXIT IN CHARGE TO KEEP US SAFE AND HIDDEN DURING DAYLIGHT.
BUT, OF COURSE, JOE DOESN'T LIKE YOU AT ALL...
...SO FOR THIS CONVERSATION, HERE I AM. WE HAVE A SYSTEM. WE ARE A SYSTEM.
I'VE LEARNED TO APPRECIATE THAT.
OKAY--NOT THAT YOUR WHOLE DEAL ISN'T FASCINATING AND TERRIFYING TO ME, BRUCE, BUT...BACK UP.
YOU FOUND THE MASS GRAVE? THAT WAS YOU?
THUNDERBOLT ROSS' BODY WAS STOLEN. FINDING OUT WHO DID IT AND WHY WAS MY TOP PRIORITY.
HE'S A BIOLOGICAL--A THEOLOGICAL WMD. A POTENTIAL DOORWAY TO AN EVIL YOU CANNOT POSSIBLY COMPREHEND.
SIZE ELEVEN. THAT'LL DO.
I'M SERIOUS, SPIDER-MAN--YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'VE BEEN DEALING WITH.
BUT APPARENTLY... THE REVERSE IS TRUE.
TELL ME ABOUT VENOM.

IT'S NOT VENOM THAT'S THE PROBLEM. IT'S CARNAGE. HE'S BACK, AND HE'S...
...WELL, SYMBIOTES LEAVE A KIND OF MARKER IN HUMAN SPINES--CALLED A CODEX. ANYONE WHO'S EVER WORN A SYMBIOTE HAS ONE.
CARNAGE IS COLLECTING THEM, AND THE MORE HE HAS, THE CLOSER HE GETS TO...A KIND OF COMMUNION, I GUESS.
HE WANTS TO SUMMON THE SYMBIOTES' ALIEN GOD TO EARTH. KNULL--GOD OF THE VOID. AND IF HE GETS HERE...
THIS GUY IS NOT GOOD NEWS, BRUCE. HE'S OLDER THAN TIME. HE'S...
...HE'S COSMIC SATAN.
HMH.
YOU DON'T SAY.
"COSMIC SATAN."

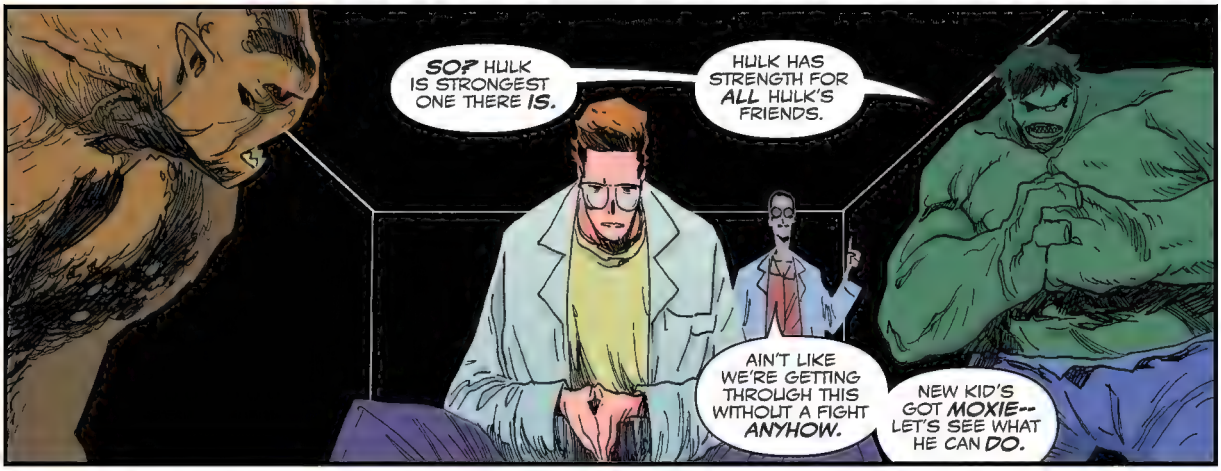

THE ONE BELOW ALL.
THAT'S WHAT THAT SOUNDED LIKE TO ME.
SO I CAN'T DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS "KNULL" OF YOURS IS SOME--SOME FACET OF THE ONE BELOW ALL.
OR SOME CREATURE IT CONTROLS, SOMETHING IT'S WORKING THROUGH.
LIKE MY FATHER.
WHICH MEANS THIS...THIS IS DEFINITELY MY PROBLEM.
AND I HAVE TO HELP.
IT AIN'T.
AND YOU DON'T.

GETTING INVOLVED WITH THIS IS A MISTAKE.
ROSS IS BACK IN HIS GRAVE--THAT PART'S OVER. SO WE'RE DONE.
BETTY AND JONES ARE WAITING IN CALIFORNIA, WHERE WE NEED TO BE. WE GOT WORK TO DO, REMEMBER?
I'M WELL AWARE.
BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE RUN OFF AND LET SOME SPACE GOD END THE WORLD.
WE'RE ENDING THE WORLD.
OUR WAY.
HNH.
ANYWAY--IT'S TOO LATE TO BACK OUT NOW.
WE'RE ALREADY INVOLVED.

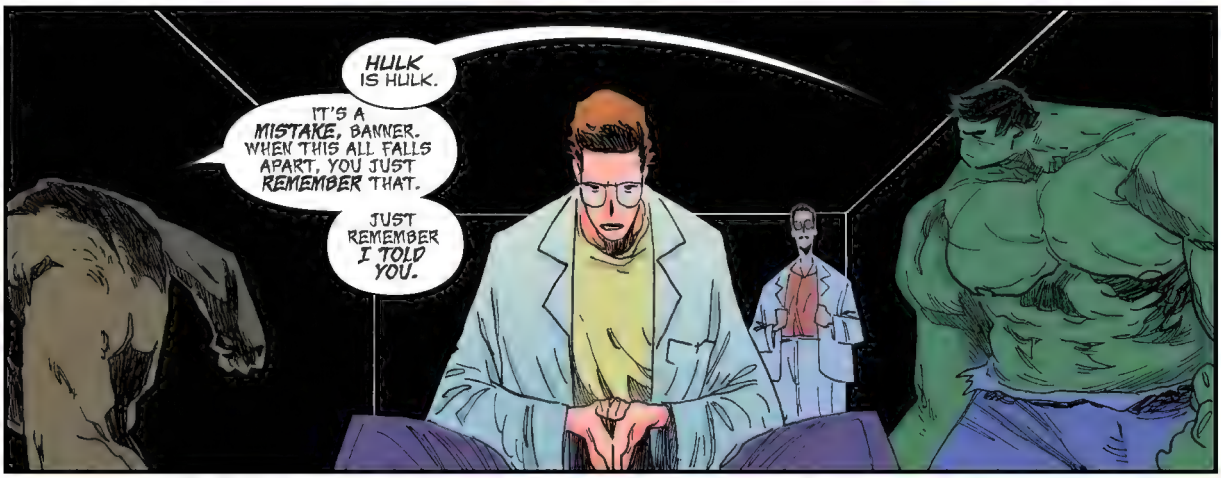
"HEAVILY INVOLVED."
THE MAGIC CODEX-EXTRACTING DOOHICKEY. LISTEN-- COULD YOU GIVE IT A LOOK OVER?
I DON'T TOTALLY TRUST THIS MAKER GUY...
I'M...NOT AS SMART AS I WAS. BUT I'LL DO WHAT I CAN.
ARE WE EXPECTING ANYONE ELSE HERE...?
KRAK
"JUST SOME AMAZING FRIENDS."
BRUCE. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU.
I...WANTED TO APOLOGIZE PERSONALLY FOR WHAT HAPPENED IN IOWA. NOT THE AVENGERS' FINEST HOUR.*
IT'S FINE, CAP.
THAT SAID... WE'D LIKE YOU TO COME IN. JUST TO TALK TO US.
WE CAN HELP YOU, BRUCE.
*EDITORS NOTE: SEE IMMORTAL HULK #7, TRUE BELIEVERS!
"AND YOUR FRIENDS."
NICE TO MEET YOU. I'M EDDIE.
BRUCE BANNER. WE'VE ACTUALLY MET A FEW TIMES-- WE BOTH LOOKED A BIT DIFFERENT, THOUGH.
OH MAN... DID I... DID WE...

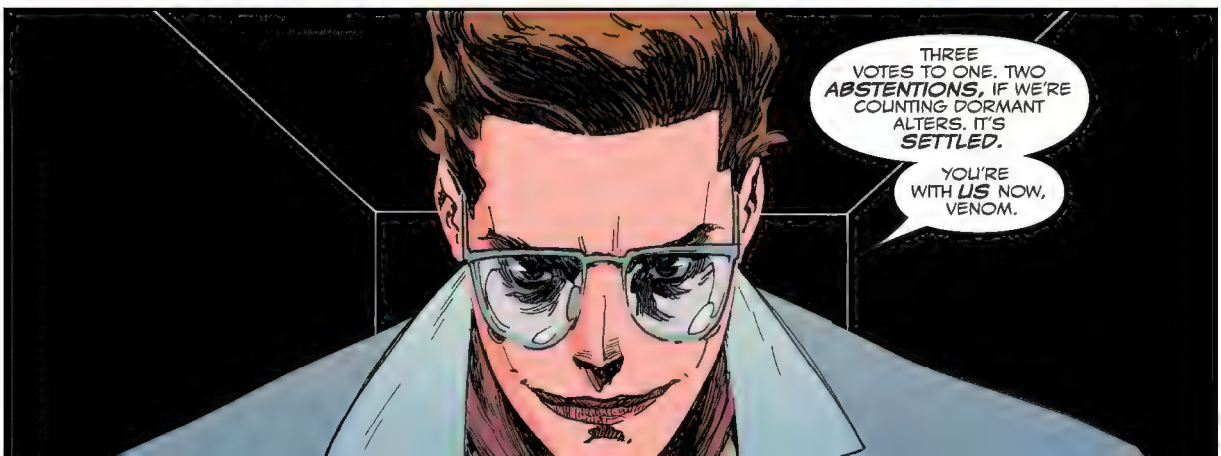
"...INFECT YOU?"
NO... DAMMIT...
"...NOT NOW!"
...
ALL RIGHT.
IT'S ACTUALLY BEEN A...
...LONG TIME...
"IT'S BEEN LESS THAN A SECOND SINCE THEN, BANNER."

JUST SEEMS LONGER IN HERE, THAT'S ALL. WE CAN STILL REJECT THIS THING.
I'LL TEAR MY OWN SPINE OUT IF I GOTTA--
NO.
I'M WILLING TO ACCEPT HIM. WORK WITH HIM.
IF WE COMBINE OUR FORCES, WE CAN--
IT DON'T WORK THAT WAY! OPEN YOUR EYES, BANNER!
LOOK AT IT!
IT'S AN ALIEN PARASITE! IT INFECTS PEOPLE! IT USES PEOPLE!
IT DON'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT YOU OR US OR ANYBODY ELSE! IT DOESN'T WANT US!
ALL IT WANTS IS OUR STRENGTH!


SO? HULK IS STRONGEST ONE THERE IS.
HULK HAS STRENGTH FOR ALL HULK'S FRIENDS.
AIN'T LIKE WE'RE GETTING THROUGH THIS WITHOUT A FIGHT ANYHOW.
NEW KID'S GOT MOXIE-- LET'S SEE WHAT HE CAN DO.

BANNER--LISTEN TO ME. YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T LISTEN TO ME.
WE'RE A SYSTEM--AND THAT THING AIN'T A PART OF IT. WE LET IT IN, ALL IT'LL DO IS MESS US UP, GUM UP THE WORKS--
SORRY, HULK.


HULK IS HULK.
IT'S A MISTAKE, BANNER. WHEN THIS ALL FALLS APART, YOU JUST REMEMBER THAT.
JUST REMEMBER I TOLD YOU.

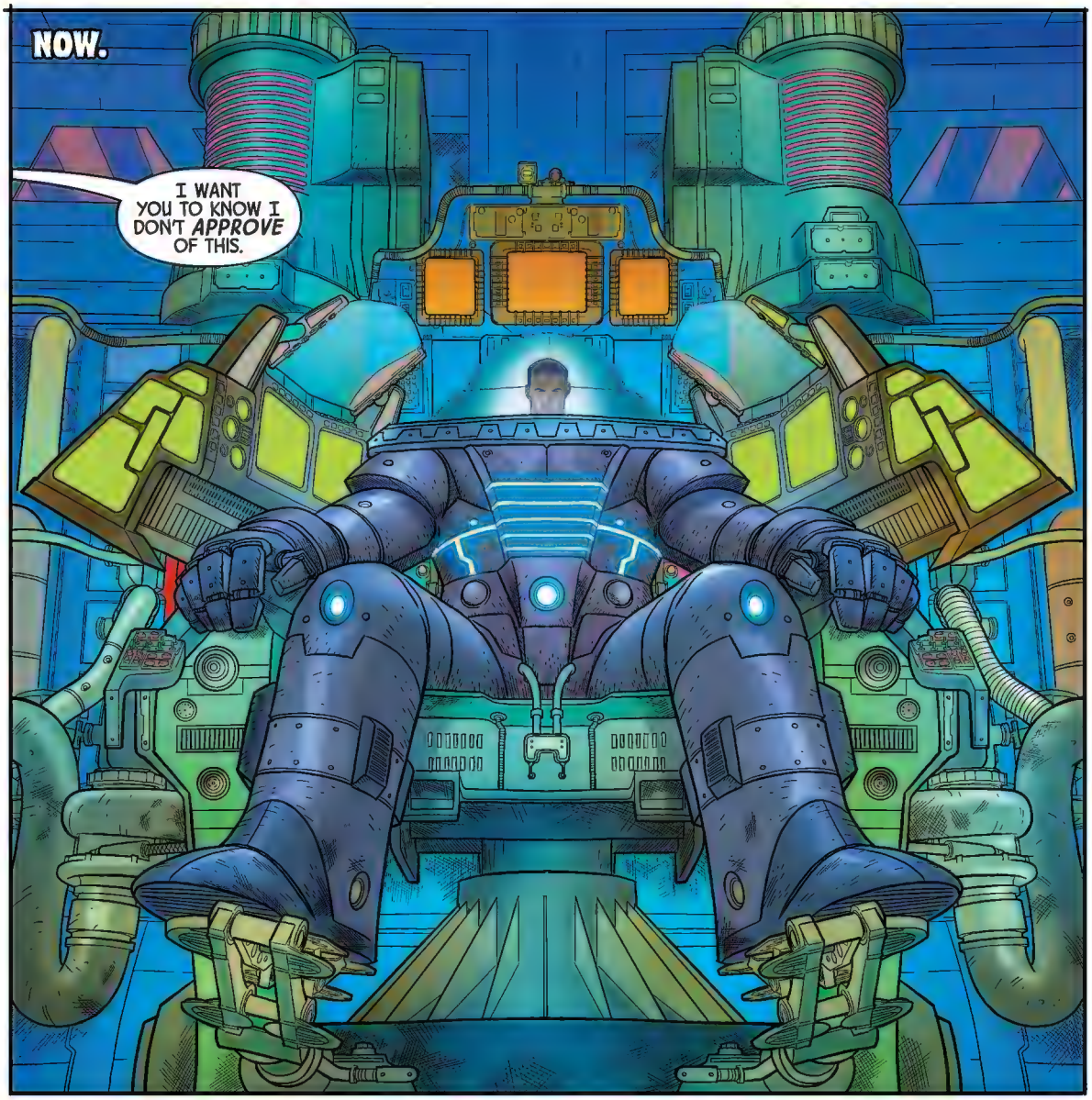

THREE VOTES TO ONE. TWO ABSTENTIONS, IF WE'RE COUNTING DORMANT ALTERS. IT'S SETTLED.
YOU'RE WITH US NOW, VENOM.

"WELCOME TO THE FAMILY."
WE ARE HULK

21

“...IN ALL CHAOS THERE IS A COSMOS, IN ALL DISORDER A SECRET ORDER...”

– CARL JUNG
*ARCHETYPES AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS*

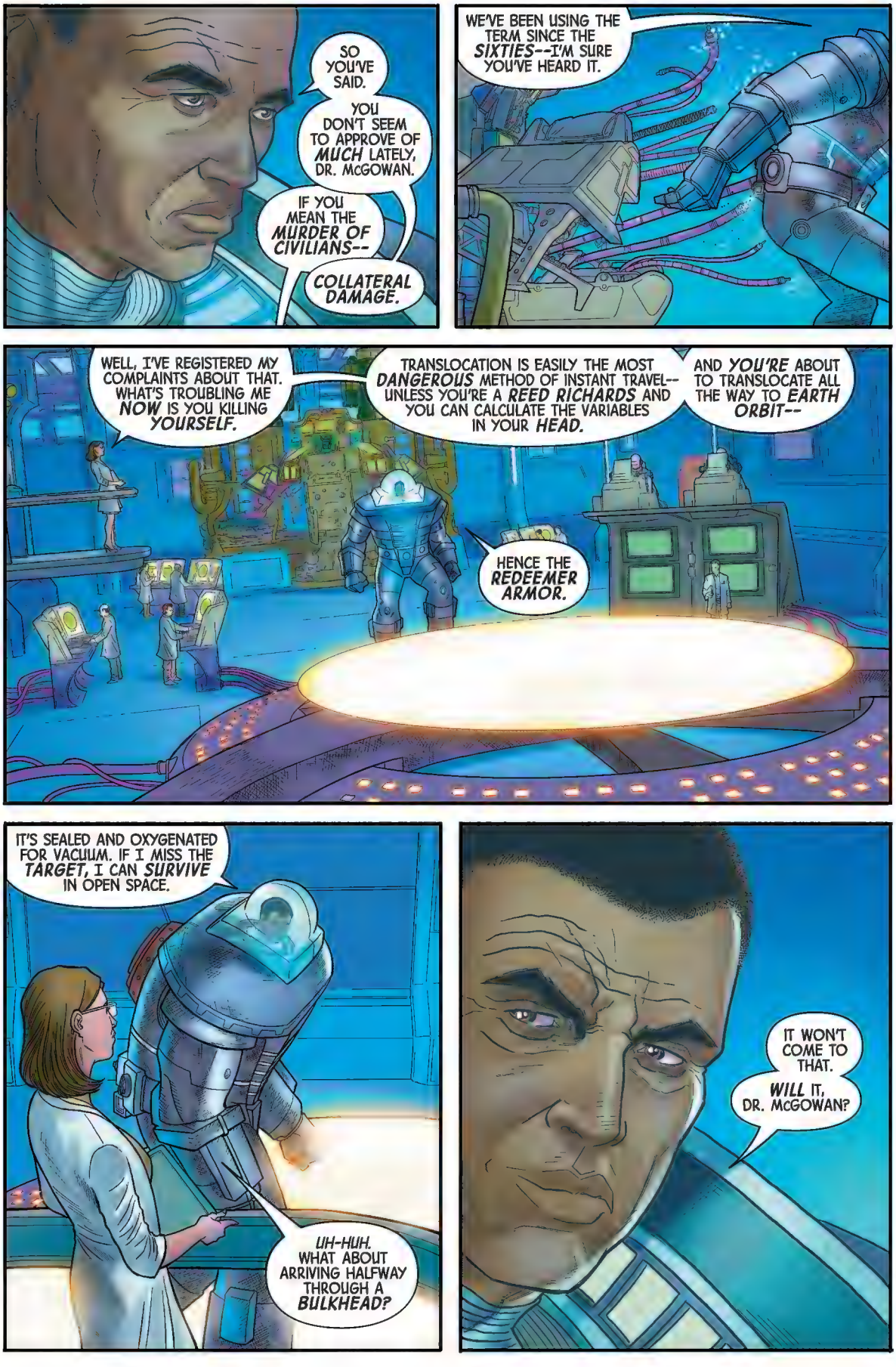


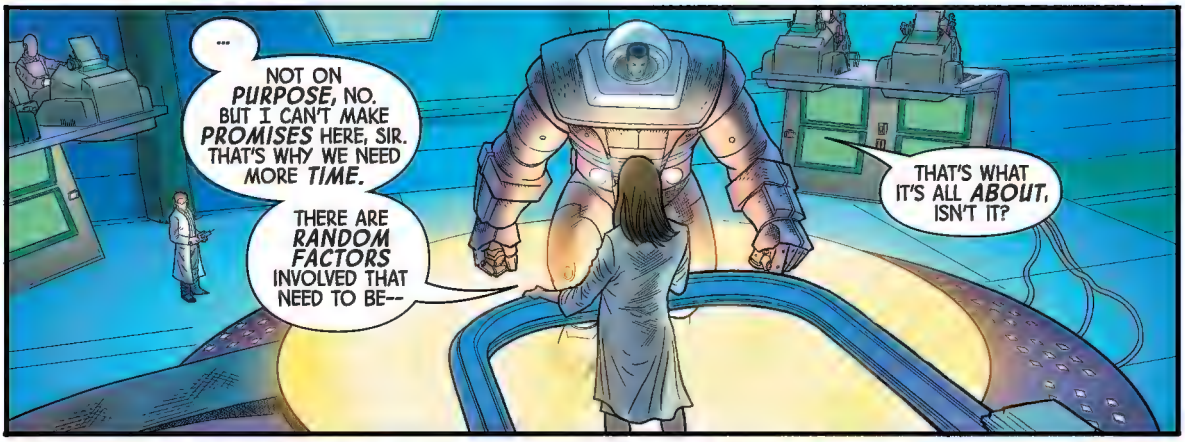

MY NAME IS REGINALD JAMES FORTEAN.
I'M 42 YEARS OLD.
I WAS ONCE A MAJOR GENERAL IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE.

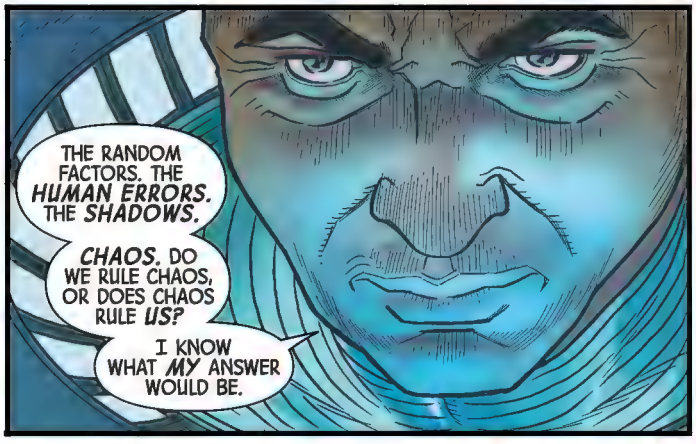
FOR MY COUNTRY,
I HAVE BECOME SOMETHING ELSE--
SOMETHING DIVORCED FROM ALL CONVENTIONAL MILITARY STRUCTURE.
A COMMANDER OF SHADOWS.

BUT EVEN IN THE SHADOWS,
THERE MUST BE AN ORDER.

I *AM* THAT ORDER.

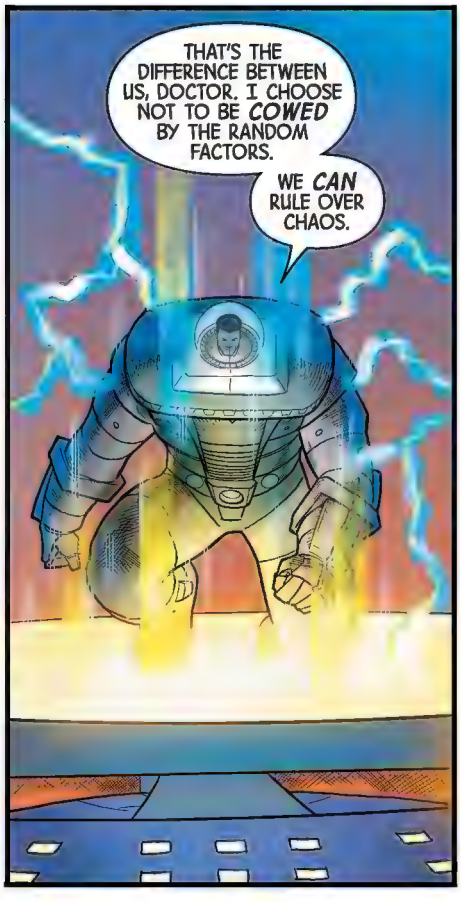

SO YOU'VE SAID.
YOU DON'T SEEM TO APPROVE OF *MUCH* LATELY, DR. McGOWAN.
IF YOU MEAN THE *MURDER OF CIVILIANS*--
*COLLATERAL DAMAGE.*
WE'VE BEEN USING THE TERM SINCE THE *SIXTIES*--I'M SURE YOU'VE HEARD IT.
WELL, I'VE REGISTERED MY COMPLAINTS ABOUT THAT. WHAT'S TROUBLING ME *NOW* IS YOU KILLING *YOURSELF.*
TRANSLOCATION IS EASILY THE MOST *DANGEROUS* METHOD OF INSTANT TRAVEL-- UNLESS YOU'RE A *REED RICHARDS* AND YOU CAN CALCULATE THE VARIABLES IN YOUR *HEAD.*
AND *YOU'RE* ABOUT TO TRANSLOCATE ALL THE WAY TO *EARTH ORBIT*--
HENCE THE *REDEEMER ARMOR.*
IT'S SEALED AND OXYGENATED FOR VACUUM. IF I MISS THE *TARGET,* I CAN *SURVIVE* IN OPEN SPACE.
*UH-HUH.* WHAT ABOUT ARRIVING HALFWAY THROUGH A *BULKHEAD?*
IT WON'T COME TO THAT.
*WILL* IT, DR. McGOWAN?


...
NOT ON PURPOSE, NO. BUT I CAN'T MAKE PROMISES HERE, SIR. THAT'S WHY WE NEED MORE TIME.
THERE ARE RANDOM FACTORS INVOLVED THAT NEED TO BE--
THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT, ISN'T IT?


THE RANDOM FACTORS. THE HUMAN ERRORS. THE SHADOWS.
CHAOS. DO WE RULE CHAOS, OR DOES CHAOS RULE US?
I KNOW WHAT MY ANSWER WOULD BE.

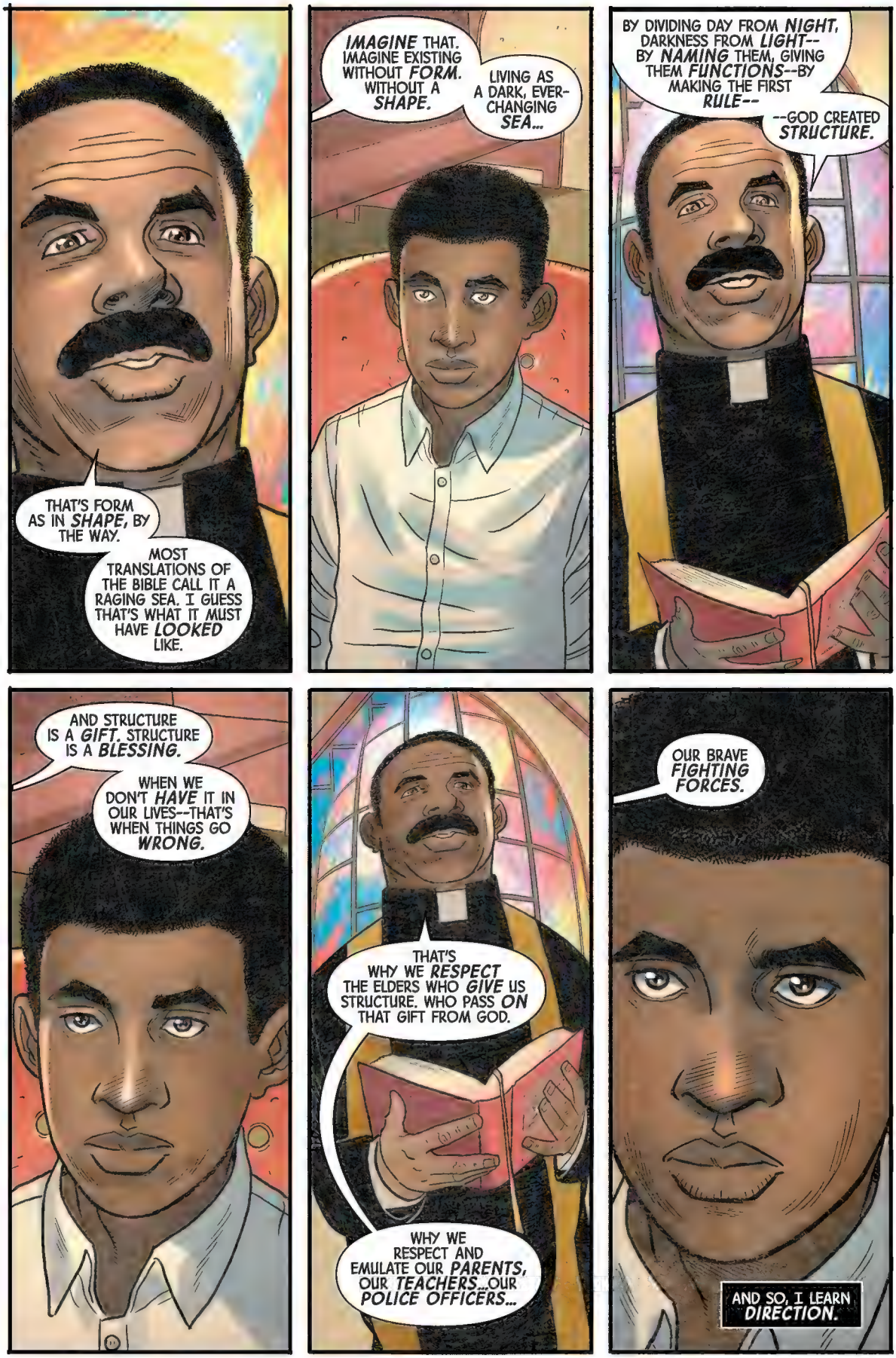
IF I DON'T COME BACK, PROTOCOL PLACES YOU IN COMMAND, DOCTOR. UNTIL THEN...THE FINAL DECISION IS MINE.
SIR-- DON'T--
BEGINNING TRANSLOCATION... NOW.

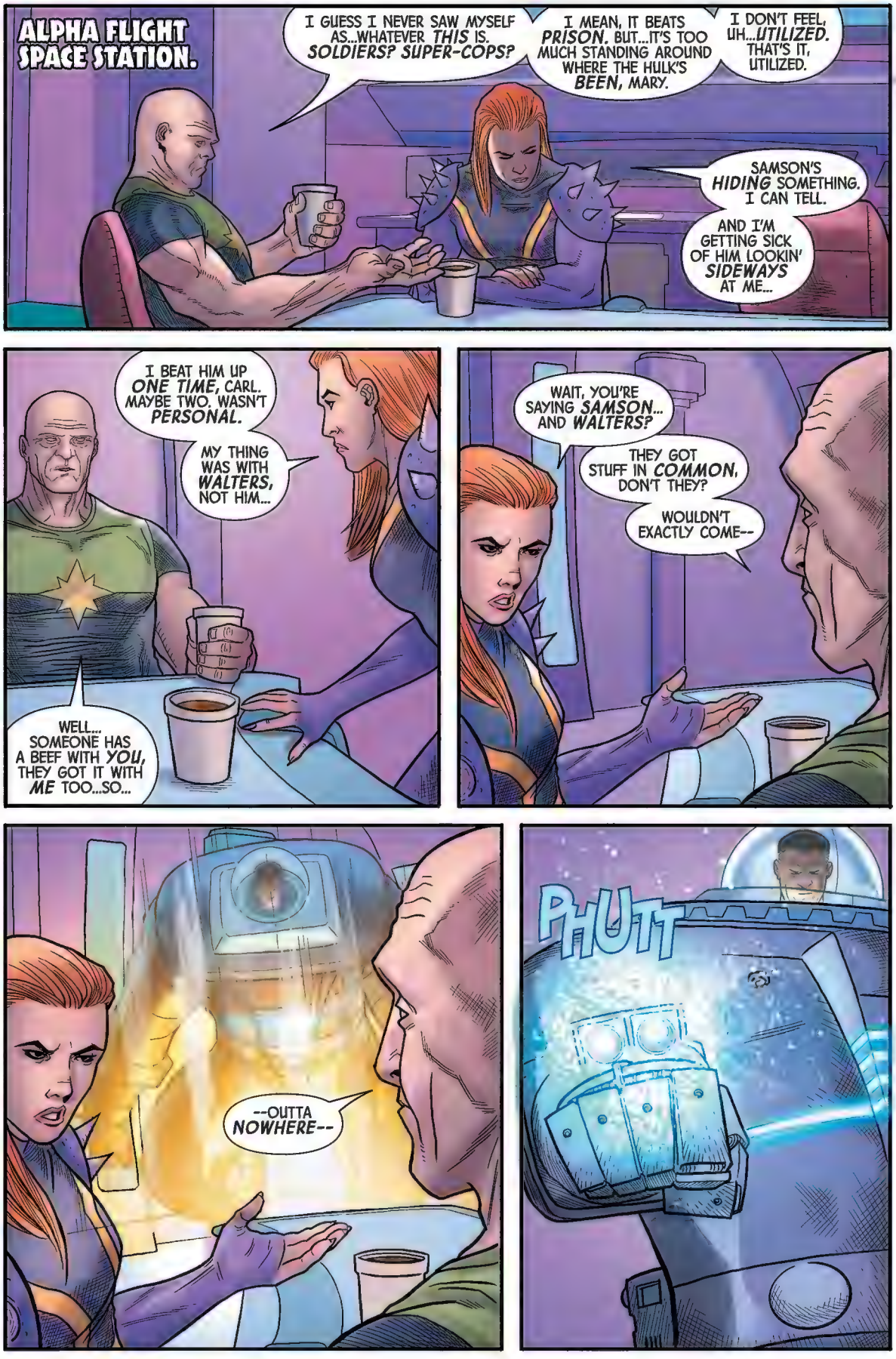
NO! SHUT IT DOWN, GENERAL!
WE NEED TO DOUBLE-CHECK-- TRIPLE-CHECK! IF THERE'S BEEN ANY ERROR AT ALL--


THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US, DOCTOR. I CHOOSE NOT TO BE COWED BY THE RANDOM FACTORS.
WE CAN RULE OVER CHAOS.

HAVE FAITH.

I'M 11 YEARS OLD.
AND GOD SAW THE LIGHT, THAT IT WAS GOOD. AND GOD DIVIDED THE LIGHT FROM THE DARKNESS.
AND GOD CALLED THE LIGHT DAY.
I AM IN SUNDAY SCHOOL.
AND THE DARKNESS HE CALLED NIGHT.
I AM LISTENING INTENTLY.
AND THE EVENING AND THE MORNING WAS THE FIRST DAY.
I WANT TO PAUSE THERE FOR A MOMENT.
WE'RE AT THE END OF THE FIRST DAY. THERE'S NO PEOPLE YET. NO ANIMALS--NOT EVEN PLANTS.
AND YET WHAT HAS GOD ALREADY DONE FOR US?
...
MADE THE LIGHT?
OF COURSE. BUT I'M THINKING OF SOMETHING EVEN MORE PROFOUND THAN THAT.
LET'S RETURN TO THE SECOND VERSE. THE EARTH WAS WITHOUT FORM, AND VOID.
WITHOUT FORM.
THINK ABOUT THAT.


THAT'S FORM AS IN SHAPE, BY THE WAY.
MOST TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE CALL IT A RAGING SEA. I GUESS THAT'S WHAT IT MUST HAVE LOOKED LIKE.
IMAGINE THAT. IMAGINE EXISTING WITHOUT FORM. WITHOUT A SHAPE.
LIVING AS A DARK, EVER-CHANGING SEA...
BY DIVIDING DAY FROM NIGHT, DARKNESS FROM LIGHT-- BY NAMING THEM, GIVING THEM FUNCTIONS--BY MAKING THE FIRST RULE--
--GOD CREATED STRUCTURE.
AND STRUCTURE IS A GIFT. STRUCTURE IS A BLESSING.
WHEN WE DON'T HAVE IT IN OUR LIVES--THAT'S WHEN THINGS GO WRONG.
THAT'S WHY WE RESPECT THE ELDERS WHO GIVE US STRUCTURE. WHO PASS ON THAT GIFT FROM GOD.
WHY WE RESPECT AND EMULATE OUR PARENTS, OUR TEACHERS...OUR POLICE OFFICERS...
OUR BRAVE FIGHTING FORCES.
AND SO, I LEARN DIRECTION.

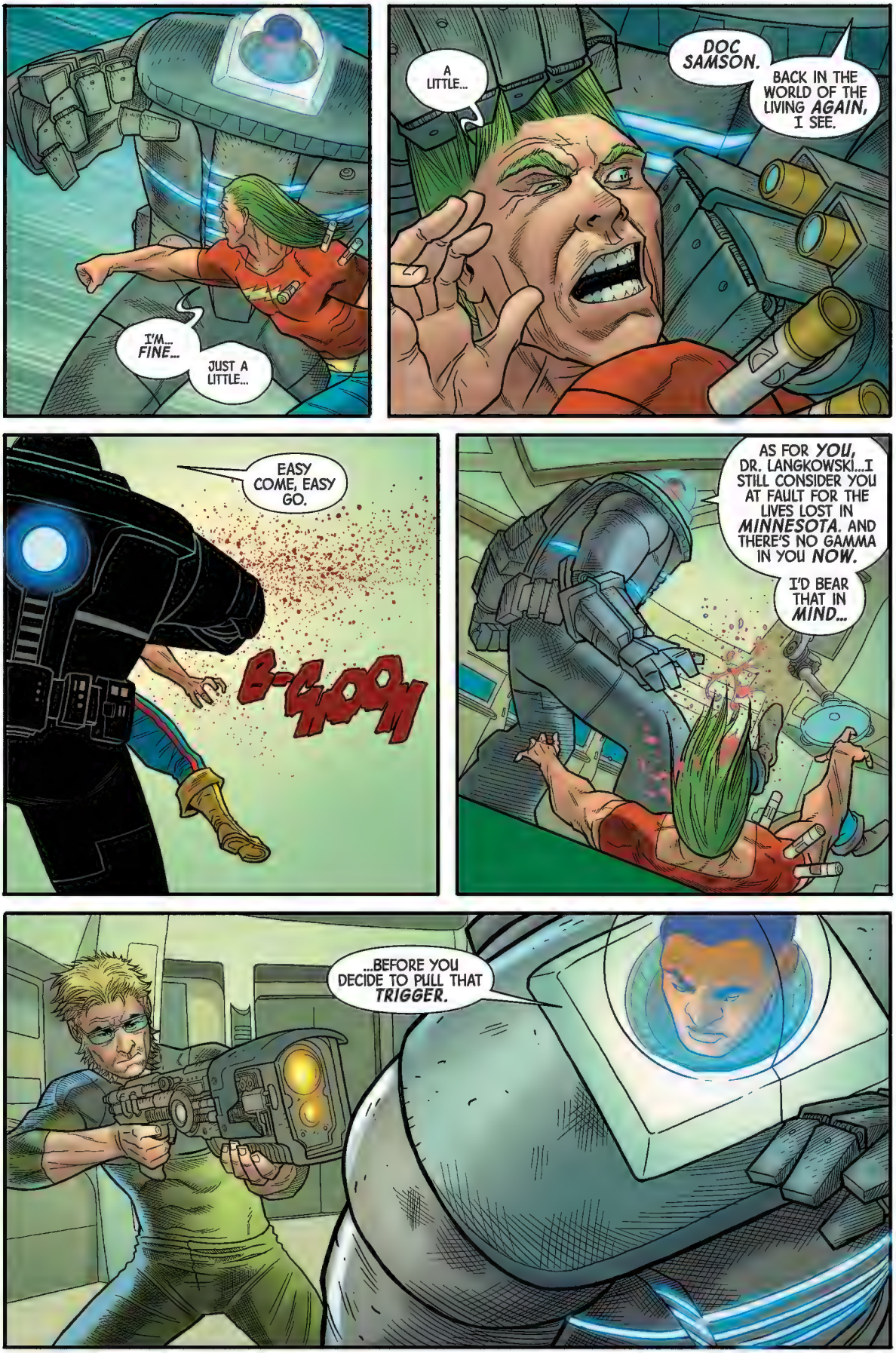

ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
I GUESS I NEVER SAW MYSELF AS...WHATEVER THIS IS. SOLDIERS? SUPER-COPS?
I MEAN, IT BEATS PRISON. BUT...IT'S TOO MUCH STANDING AROUND WHERE THE HULK'S BEEN, MARY.
I DON'T FEEL, UH...UTILIZED. THAT'S IT, UTILIZED.
SAMSON'S HIDING SOMETHING. I CAN TELL.
AND I'M GETTING SICK OF HIM LOOKIN' SIDEWAYS AT ME...
I BEAT HIM UP ONE TIME, CARL. MAYBE TWO. WASN'T PERSONAL.
MY THING WAS WITH WALTERS, NOT HIM...
WELL... SOMEONE HAS A BEEF WITH YOU, THEY GOT IT WITH ME TOO...SO...
WAIT, YOU'RE SAYING SAMSON... AND WALTERS?
THEY GOT STUFF IN COMMON, DON'T THEY?
WOULDN'T EXACTLY COME--
--OUTTA NOWHERE--
PHUTT

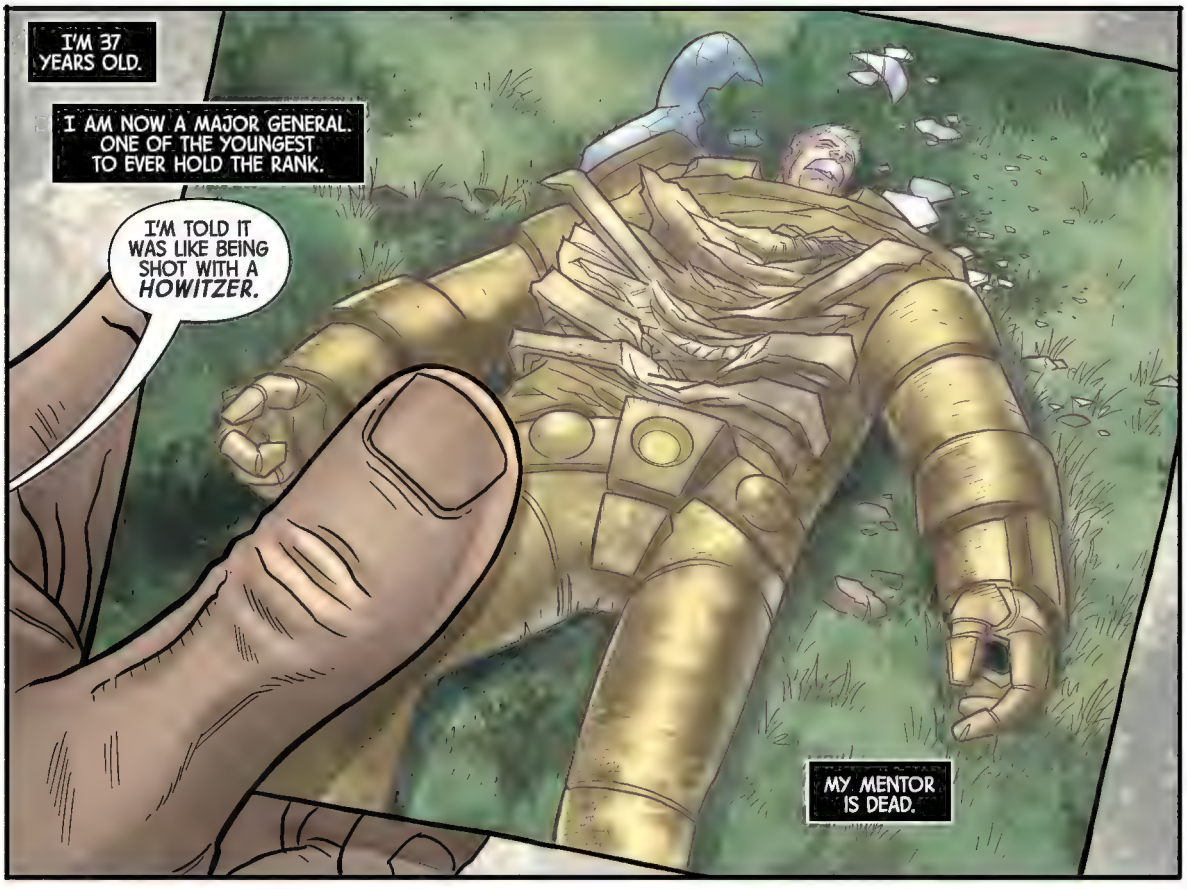
HNNH--
CARL--
WHAT DID YOU DO? WHAT WAS IN THAT?
FENTANYL. IN A TITANIUM NEEDLE.
YOUR HUSBAND MIGHT BE HARD TO KILL--
--BUT HE'S SHOWN A WEAKNESS TO DRUGS IN THE PAST.
YOU...
I'M GONNA TURN THAT SUIT INTO A COFFIN.
MAYBE YOU COULD, MS. MacPHERRAN.
OR MAYBE I COULD FINALLY DO WHAT THE COURTS SEEM RELUCTANT TO.
PHUTT
PHUTT
PHUTT
BUT I'M ON A TIMETABLE.
SO I'LL LEAVE YOU BE.

I'M 28 YEARS OLD.
I AM NOW A MAJOR IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE.
LEAVE...
HULK...
ALONE!
I AM UNABLE TO PROCESS WHAT I AM SEEING.
...HOW?
YOU SAY SOMETHING, REG?
I--I JUST-- HOW CAN WE KEEP---FIGHTING THIS--
--THIS THING--

THE THING'S THE ORANGE ONE, REG--
MAJOR TALBOT--YOU HAVE COMMAND. KEEP HERDING IT OUT OF TOWN.
I--I'M SORRY, GENERAL ROSS.
MAJOR FORTEAN--A WORD.
JUST--FOR A MOMENT THERE--
NEVER APOLOGIZE FOR BEING HUMAN, SON.
I'VE FELT IT TOO--WE ALL HAVE. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THIS... SITUATION.
BUT HERE'S HOW I HANDLE IT.
TAKE A LOOK OVER THERE. THAT GIRL.
SHE JUST LOST HER HOME, AND EVERYTHING IN IT. HER LIFE WILL NEVER BE THE SAME.
AND THERE ARE HUNDREDS LIKE HER. HUNDREDS. IN THIS ONE TOWN ALONE.
WHEN I HAVE MY MOMENTS OF...OF DOUBT, IN THE FACE OF THIS...I THINK ABOUT THAT. AND THEY PASS.
HOW ABOUT YOU, MAJOR?
...YES, SIR. YOU CAN COUNT ON ME, SIR.
I'VE HAD MY CRISIS OF FAITH.
AND SO, I LEARN FOCUS.

WALTER. DON'T GET DISTRACTED.
REMEMBER WHAT I SAID. DON'T TOUCH THE RESIDUE WITH YOUR BARE HANDS.
RIGHT, RIGHT...
IS "RESIDUE" THE RIGHT WORD? THIS IS MORE LIKE A... I DON'T KNOW, A SHED SKIN, ONLY THERE'S MUSCLE AND BONE HERE TOO...
I THINK SOMEONE WORE THIS. LIKE BIOLOGICAL ARMOR. OR A HUSK...A SHELL...
A QLIPPOTH...
...
YOU DON'T SUPPOSE...
PHUTT
UHH!
PHUTT PHUTT PHUTT
HNN--
SAMSON!


I'M... FINE...
JUST A LITTLE...
A LITTLE...
DOC SAMSON.
BACK IN THE WORLD OF THE LIVING AGAIN, I SEE.
EASY COME, EASY GO.
B-GOOM
AS FOR YOU, DR. LANGKOWSKI...I STILL CONSIDER YOU AT FAULT FOR THE LIVES LOST IN MINNESOTA. AND THERE'S NO GAMMA IN YOU NOW.
I'D BEAR THAT IN MIND...
...BEFORE YOU DECIDE TO PULL THAT TRIGGER.


I'M 37 YEARS OLD.
I AM NOW A MAJOR GENERAL. ONE OF THE YOUNGEST TO EVER HOLD THE RANK.
I'M TOLD IT WAS LIKE BEING SHOT WITH A HOWITZER.
MY MENTOR IS DEAD.

I WANT REVENGE.
EXCEPT THE REDEEMER ARMOR WAS BUILT TO SURVIVE THAT. THIS HIT HARDER.
A PUNCH FROM THE HULK--OR ONE OF THEM.

YOU SHOWED THAT PHOTO TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, FORTEAN?
YES, SIR, I DID.
WHAT DID HE SAY?

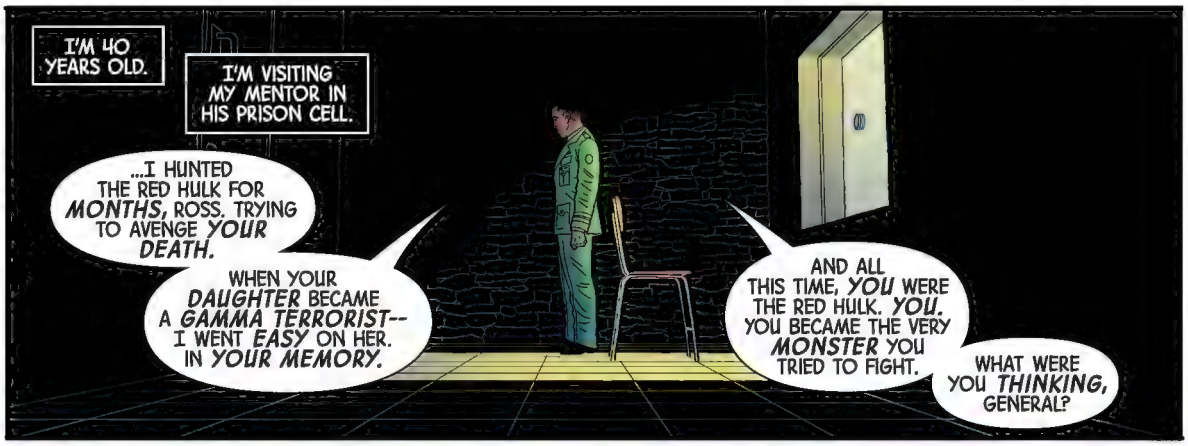
"THERE ARE OTHER JOBS WE NEED TO DO." HIS EXACT WORDS.
I'LL BE FRANK WITH YOU, GENTLEMEN.

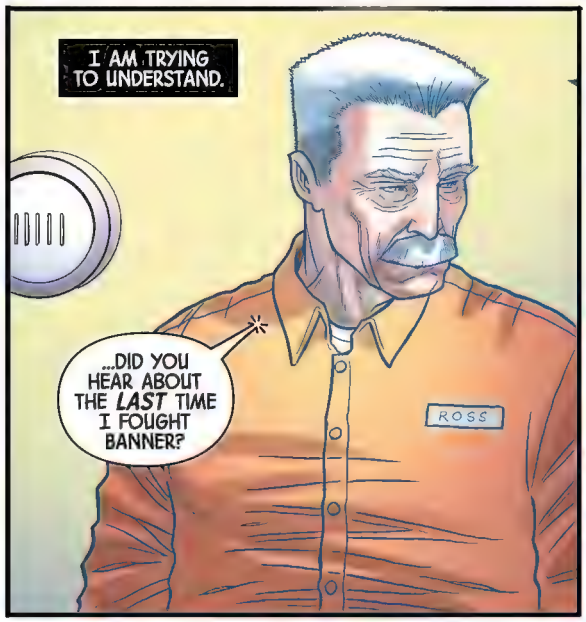
I CONSIDER THAT WEAKNESS. AT BEST, IT'S THE CONTINUATION OF THE HANDOFF OF DEFENSE TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR.
SO NOW, EVEN WHEN ONE OF OUR OWN IS KILLED, WE AREN'T ALLOWED TO RETALIATE...
YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT--

--BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT.
MY DEPARTMENT IS ALREADY AN ADJUNCT OF THE BRANCHES.
YOU MEN HAVE DISCRETIONARY BUDGET PROVISIONS.
IF EVERYBODY WORKS WITH ME, I CAN COMBINE RESOURCES AND FUNDS...
"...AND WE CAN SHOW ALL THE MUTANTS AND MONSTERS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CROSS THE UNITED STATES MILITARY."
"HELL YES, GENERAL. I LIKE YOUR THINKING."
COUNT ME IN AS WELL, REG. OLD THUNDERBOLT DESERVED BETTER.
WE SHOULD DISCUSS THE SPECIFICS ELSEWHERE. WE'RE IN THE OPEN--S.H.I.E.L.D. COULD HAVE THIS WHOLE CONVERSATION RECORDED.
WITH THEIR INTEREST IN THE HULK, COULD BE THEY'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS PRESSURE YOU'RE GETTING...
I'D CALL THAT A CERTAINTY, HOWARD.
MY SOURCES TELL ME THEY TOOK OVER THE GAMMA BASE FACILITY IN DEATH VALLEY...
THEN GAMMA BASE IS COMPROMISED. WE'LL HAVE TO BUILD OUR OWN--FOR WHEN IT FAILS.
A SHADOW BASE.
AND WHEN WE NEED IT...WE WON'T HESITATE TO PULL THE TRIGGER.
AND SO, I LEARN PATIENCE.

CLICK
EAT THIS--
OH NO--
MISFIRE. GUESS IT NEEDED CLEANING.
RANDOM FACTORS, DR. LANGKOWSKI.
CHAOS. DO WE RULE OVER IT?
OR DOES IT RULE OVER US?
WAIT-- JUST WAIT A SECOND--
MINNESOTA. FOUR DEAD.
IN THE END, YOU COULDN'T CONTROL THE CHAOS.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS--
B-GLOOM
B-GLOOM
B-GLOOM
BUT I CAN.
GOODBYE, WALTER.

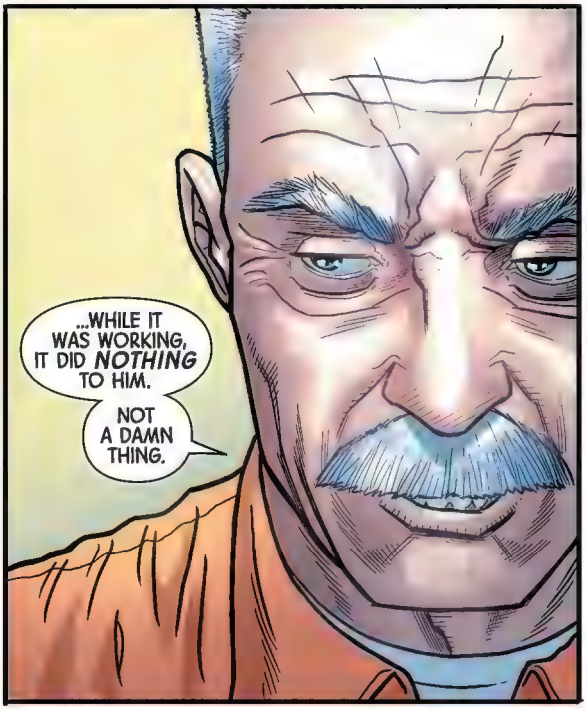
...
FORTEAN TO SHADOW BASE.
RETRIEVAL OF THE SHELL IS COMPLETE.
NO HUMAN CASUALTIES.
...GENERAL?
NO HUMAN CASUALTIES?
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
BEAM ME UP.
GENERAL?

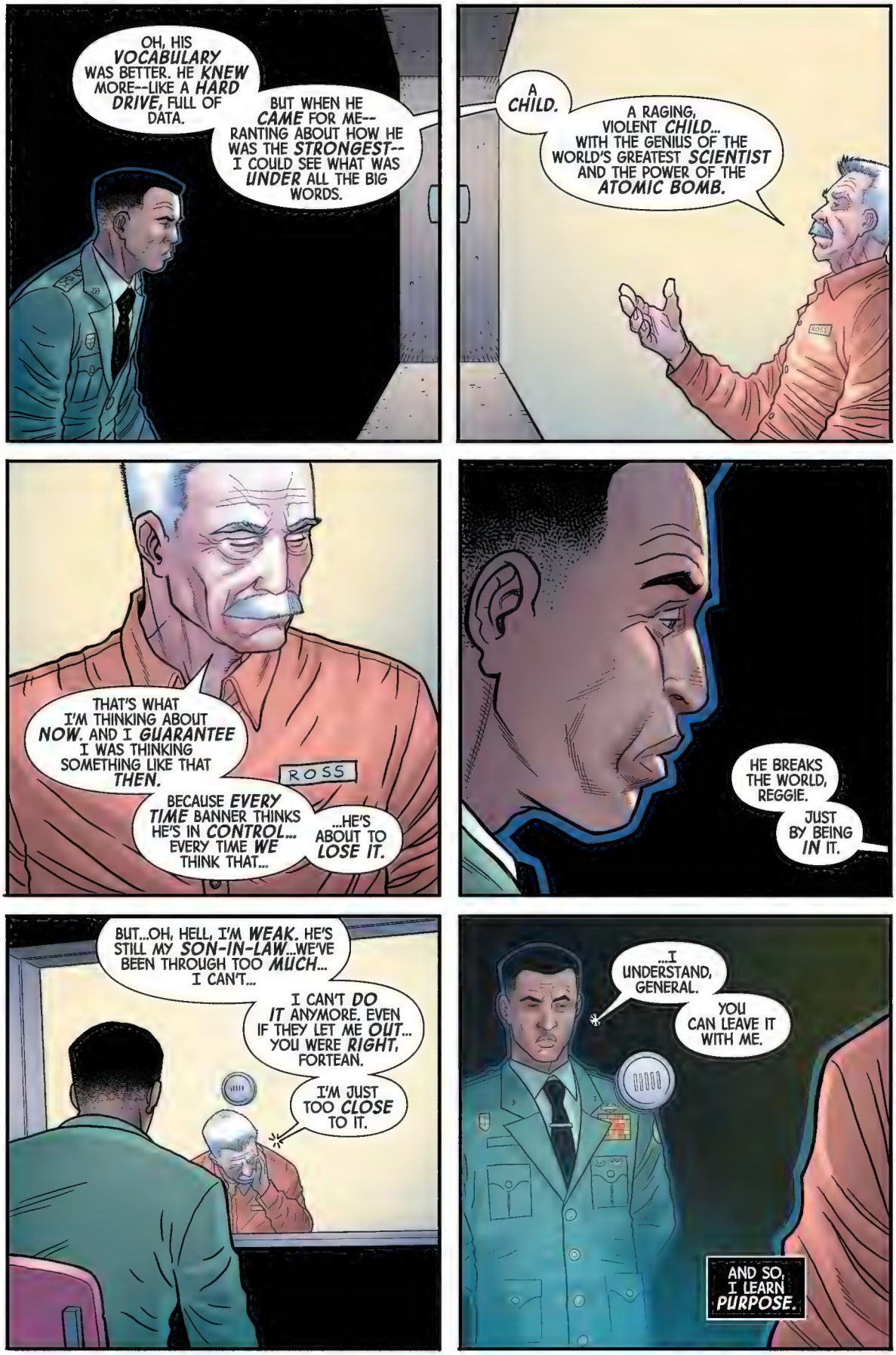

I'M 40 YEARS OLD.
I'M VISITING MY MENTOR IN HIS PRISON CELL.
...I HUNTED THE RED HULK FOR MONTHS, ROSS. TRYING TO AVENGE YOUR DEATH.
WHEN YOUR DAUGHTER BECAME A GAMMA TERRORIST-- I WENT EASY ON HER. IN YOUR MEMORY.
AND ALL THIS TIME, YOU WERE THE RED HULK. YOU. YOU BECAME THE VERY MONSTER YOU TRIED TO FIGHT.
WHAT WERE YOU THINKING, GENERAL?

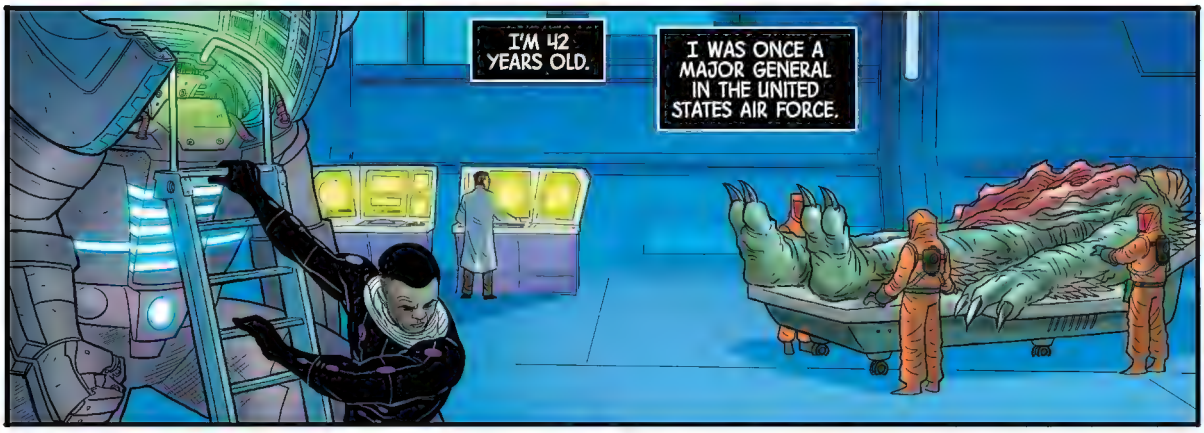

I AM TRYING TO UNDERSTAND.
...DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE LAST TIME I FOUGHT BANNER?
ROSS

I DON'T SEE HOW THAT'S RELEVANT--
HE HAD EXTREMIS IN HIM. THAT NANO-JUNK TONY STARK MADE TO PROGRAM THE HUMAN BODY.
SAME STUFF BANNER USED TO TURN ME HUMAN FOR KEEPS.

HE'D USED IT ON HIMSELF-- TURNED THE HULK INTO A GENIUS. "DOC GREEN."
IT WORE OFF EVENTUALLY. BUT I TELL YOU, WHILE IT WAS WORKING...


...WHILE IT WAS WORKING, IT DID NOTHING TO HIM.
NOT A DAMN THING.


OH, HIS VOCABULARY WAS BETTER. HE KNEW MORE--LIKE A HARD DRIVE, FULL OF DATA.
BUT WHEN HE CAME FOR ME--RANTING ABOUT HOW HE WAS THE STRONGEST--I COULD SEE WHAT WAS UNDER ALL THE BIG WORDS.
A CHILD.
A RAGING, VIOLENT CHILD... WITH THE GENIUS OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST SCIENTIST AND THE POWER OF THE ATOMIC BOMB.
ROSS
THAT'S WHAT I'M THINKING ABOUT NOW. AND I GUARANTEE I WAS THINKING SOMETHING LIKE THAT THEN.
BECAUSE EVERY TIME BANNER THINKS HE'S IN CONTROL... EVERY TIME WE THINK THAT...
...HE'S ABOUT TO LOSE IT.
HE BREAKS THE WORLD, REGGIE.
JUST BY BEING IN IT.
BUT...OH, HELL, I'M WEAK. HE'S STILL MY SON-IN-LAW...WE'VE BEEN THROUGH TOO MUCH... I CAN'T...
I CAN'T DO IT ANYMORE. EVEN IF THEY LET ME OUT... YOU WERE RIGHT, FORTEAN.
I'M JUST TOO CLOSE TO IT.
...I UNDERSTAND, GENERAL.
YOU CAN LEAVE IT WITH ME.
AND SO, I LEARN PURPOSE.

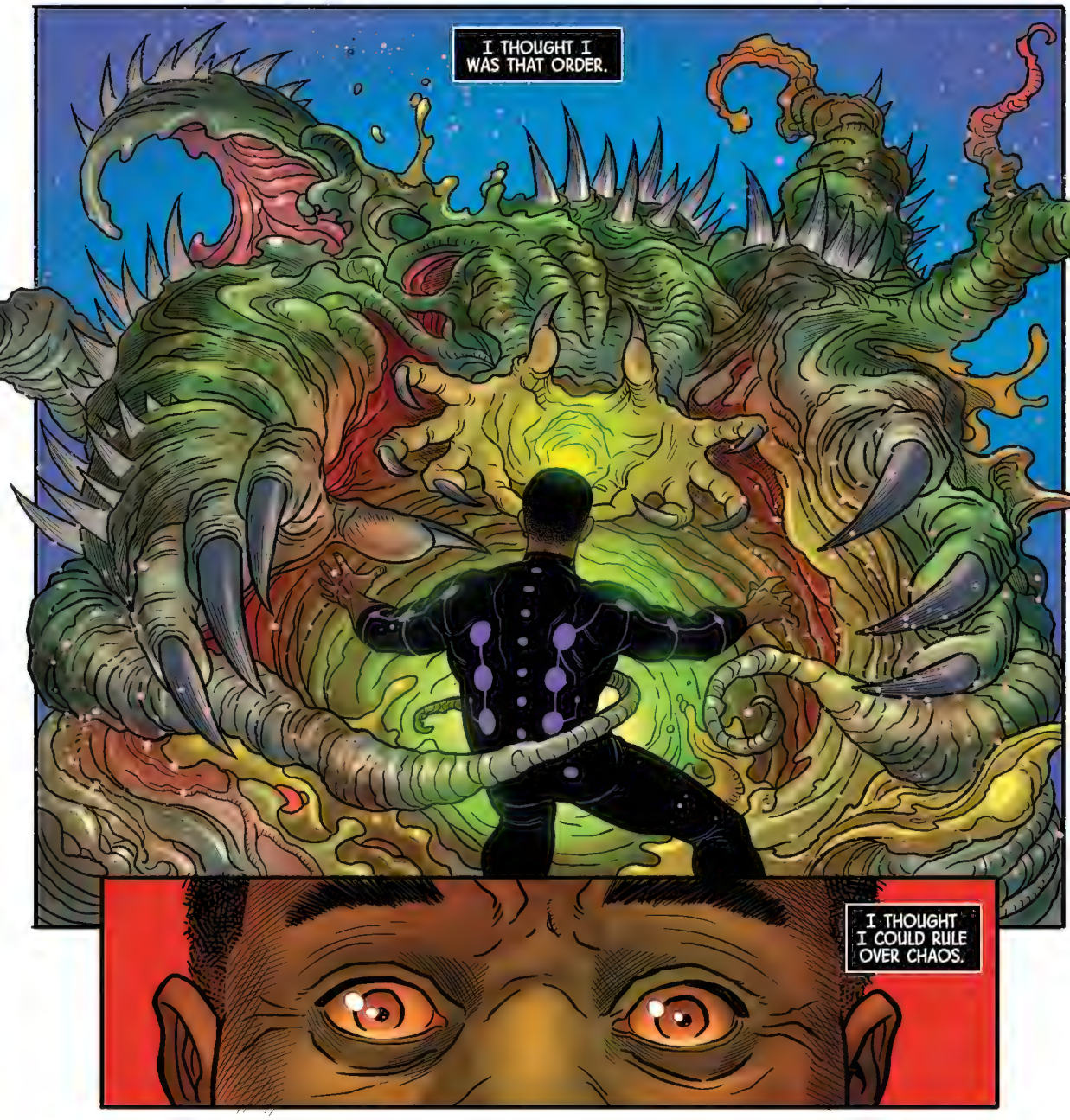

I'M 42 YEARS OLD.
I WAS ONCE A MAJOR GENERAL IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE.

FOR MY COUNTRY... I HAVE BECOME SOMETHING ELSE.
SOMETHING DIVORCED FROM ALL CONVENTIONAL MILITARY STRUCTURE.
BRING IT HERE.

I--I DON'T THINK DR. McGOWAN WOULD--WOULD *APPROVE* OF THAT, GENERAL FORTEAN--
*McGOWAN* CAN REGISTER HER *COMPLAINTS* AND THEN CONTINUE HER *WORK*.
AS SHE *ALWAYS* DOES. AS SHE ALWAYS *WILL*.

NOW.
BRING IT *HERE*.
A COMMANDER OF SHADOWS.

BUT EVEN IN THE SHADOWS, THERE MUST BE AN ORDER.
*SIR*-- DON'T *TOUCH* IT--




I DID NOT KNOW WHAT CHAOS WAS.

# A SECRET ORDER

22

"HERE'S A KNOCKING INDEED! IF A MAN WERE PORTER OF HELL-GATE, HE SHOULD HAVE OLD TURNING THE KEY."

– WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
*MACBETH*, ACT II, SCENE 3

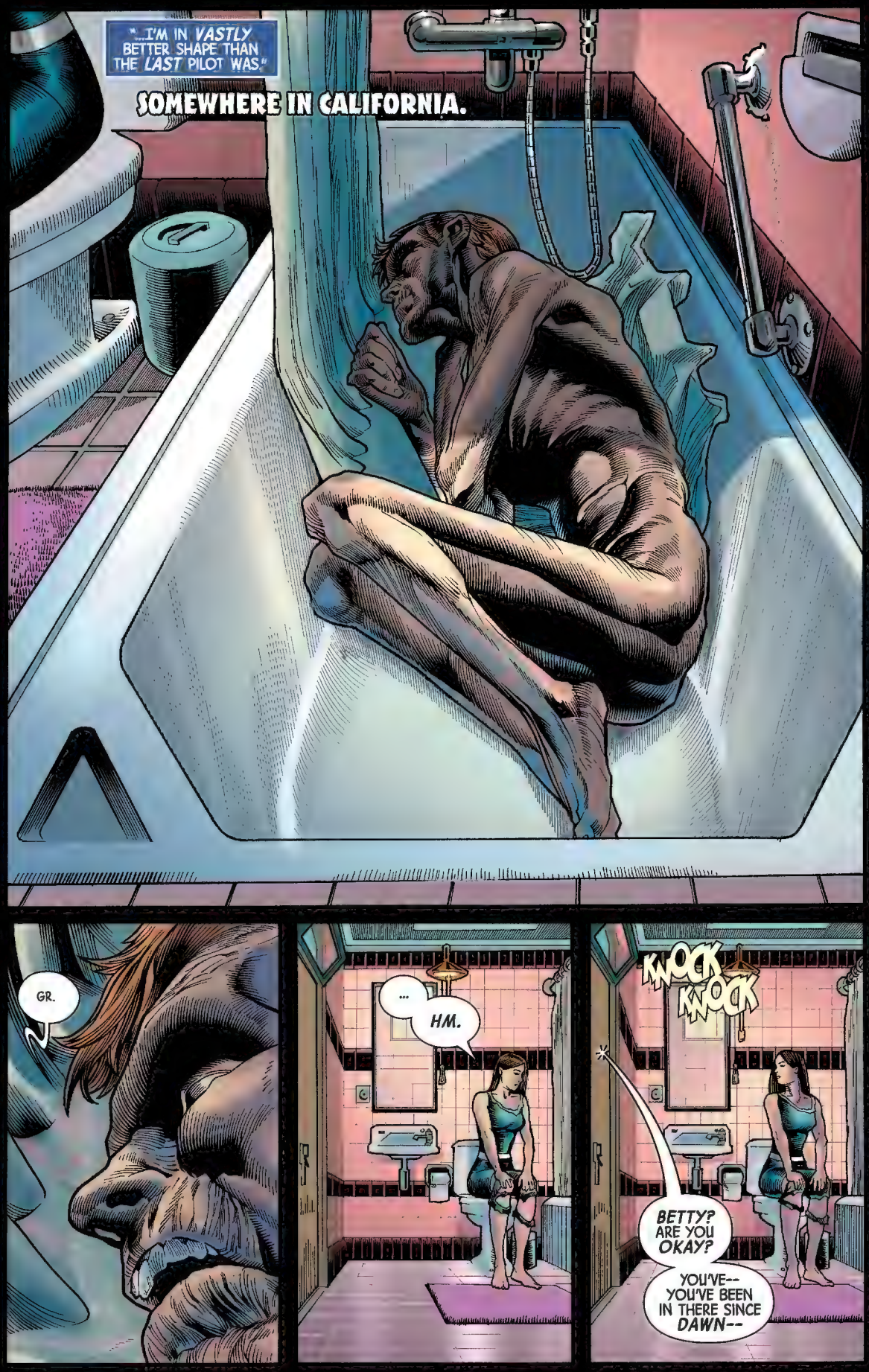
ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
NO CHANGE.
WALTER'S STILL DEAD...
YEAH.
BRAND'S TALKING ABOUT GETTING THE WAKANDANS INVOLVED, BUT THE U.S. IS DENYING ALL KNOWLEDGE, SO...
I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE POLITICS.
PUCK-- HE WAS YOUR FRIEND--
HE'S ALPHA FLIGHT. ALPHANS... WE NEVER MOURN UNLESS WE REALLY HAVE TO, EH? WE GET A LOT OF FALSE ALARMS.
HELL, THIS ALL STARTED BECAUSE WALT GOT HIMSELF KILLED. HE'S LIKE YOU.
A GAMMA GUY...
EXCEPT IT'S A WEEK LATER, AND I'M...BACK. AND HE ISN'T.
WHY AM I STILL HERE?
YEAH. WHY ARE YOU HERE?

'CAUSE I DON'T SEE YOU HELPING US OUT WITH THE HULK, SAMSON.
AND I TOLD YOU--IF WE DON'T FIND HIM? THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS.
AND DON'T TELL ME YOU CAN'T FIND HIM. I KNOW YOU'RE HOLDING OUT ON US.
TITANIA--
YOU WANNA PROTECT YOUR BUDDY, YOUR PATIENT--YEAH, GREAT. NICE ETHICS, DOC.
BUT WE'RE PAST THAT NOW. FOLKS DIED IN THAT MOTEL. CIVILIANS.
A "GOOD GUY" WENT TO WAR WITH THE HULK--
--THE ONE WHO WANTS TO END THE WORLD, THE ONE YOU'RE PROTECTING--AND PEOPLE DIED.
AND THEN THAT SAME CREEP SHOWS UP HERE?
KILLS LANGKOWSKI? SHOOTS CARL UP WITH--WITH MORPHINE OR WHATEVER?
YEAH. THAT WAS...I MEAN, I BEEN CLEAN A WHILE NOW.
THAT WAS CROSSIN' A LINE, YOU KNOW?
I THINK I NEED A LITTLE PAYBACK ON THAT.
YOU ABSOLUTELY DO, MR. CREEL.
AND WE'VE SAT ON OUR HANDS LONG ENOUGH.

ANY OBJECTIONS TO ME TAKING THE LEAD FROM HERE?
YOU WEREN'T BEFORE?
NO OFFENSE TO THE DEAD AND ALL, BUT LEADERSHIP-WISE? LANGKOWSKI WASN'T EXACTLY DOC DOOM...
OH YEAH. I MEAN, DOOM WALKS IN A ROOM--IT'S HIS ROOM, YOU KNOW?
LANGKOWSKI... I MEAN...HE WAS THERE...
THE MAN IS BARELY COLD--
GOOD POINT. LET'S GET HIM OUT OF THE MORGUE AND INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION. I'VE NOT GIVEN UP ON WALT YET, BUT I DON'T WANT HIM DECOMPOSING TOO FAR EITHER.
AFTER THAT? WELL, GAMMA FLIGHT'S REMIT IS HULK-RELATED ACTIVITY--AND THIS DEFINITELY COUNTS, EH?
IF THIS GENERAL FORTEAN CHARACTER WANTS TO ESCALATE--
"--WE CAN ESCALATE RIGHT BACK AT HIM."
SHADOW BASE SITE B.
WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?
FIRST YOU KILL TWO GAMMA FLIGHT MEMBERS RETRIEVING THE ABOMINATION SHELL--ON YOUR SO-CALLED STEALTH MISSION--
--AND THEN YOU DO THIS?

YOU'RE WEARING IT? YOU'VE BONDED WITH IT?
WE--WE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT WAS POSSIBLE! THIS IS UNKNOWN TERRITORY, GENERAL! WE HAVE TO RUN TESTS!
NOW!
WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THE GAMMA IS DOING TO YOUR INTERNAL ORGANS, OR--OR YOUR MIND--
DR. MCGOWAN...
...YOUR GENIUS HAS BOUGHT YOU SOME LEEWAY. IN TERMS OF YOUR CONSTANT INSUBORDINATION.
BUT I AM IN CONTROL HERE.
I.
AM IN.
CONTROL.

YOU... YOU'RE... UH...
...BLEEDING...
THERE ARE SOME... SIDE EFFECTS, YES. MINOR SIDE EFFECTS. NOTHING FOR YOU TO TROUBLE YOURSELF WITH, DOCTOR.
THIS WAS ALWAYS THE NATURE OF THE PROJECT.
WE FIGHT MONSTERS, AND WE MAKE WEAPONS.
THE ABOMINATION WAS A MONSTER--A TERROR AGAINST SOCIETY--NOW IT IS OUR WEAPON.
CLAK
MY WEAPON.
WE ARE AT WAR WITH CHAOS.
TO PROPERLY FIGHT THAT WAR, I WILL USE WHATEVER I HAVE TO--AGAINST WHOEVER I HAVE TO. REMEMBER THAT, McGOWAN.
AND IN TERMS OF THE SHELL'S EFFECT ON ME...


"...I'M IN VASTLY BETTER SHAPE THAN THE LAST PILOT WAS."
SOMEWHERE IN CALIFORNIA.
GR.
...
HM.
KNOCK KNOCK
BETTY? ARE YOU OKAY?
YOU'VE-- YOU'VE BEEN IN THERE SINCE DAWN--

WE--WE HAVE TO TALK--
OH.
YES?
I JUST... HOPED...
...IS THERE ANY MORE CHANGE IN RICK?
HE MADE A NOISE. I THINK.
OR NOT.
GREAT.
BETTY-- I NEED TO TALK. TO YOU. AND...IT'S THE DAY...SO...
ARE YOU... ARE YOU ABLE TO CHANGE BACK?
OH YES.
...
ARE YOU GOING TO?
NO.
THIS IS ME.

SO YOU'VE SAID.
I...I JUST... I CAN'T...I'M SORRY, I...
I CAN'T DO THIS.
HEY, BETTS! LOOKING GOOD!
THANK YOU, JOE.
THAT'S VERY KIND.
HEY, I MEAN IT. I'D KILL FOR SOME CLAWS AND FEATHERS RIGHT NOW.
LISTEN, WHILE I'M OUT, I'M GONNA CHECK ON McGEE.
YOU WANT I SHOULD BRING BACK SOME LUNCH?
NO THANK YOU.
GOODBYE, JOE.
CLICK
SUIT YOURSELF...
...
MM.
GRUM.

HEH.
Y'KNOW WHAT?
YOU AN' ME?
I THINK WE'RE STARTIN' TO GET ALONG.
"SUNSHINE JOE."
WHAT A CONCEPT.
NOTES TOWARD...SOMETHING. A FRONT PAGE, IF I LIVE TO WRITE IT.
NOT A GUARANTEE WHEN A BLACK-OPS ANTI-HULK OPERATION SEEMS TO WANT ME DEAD BEFORE I CAN.
WE'VE BEEN ON THE RUN SINCE RENO.
MOVING BETWEEN MOTELS, SMUGGLING BETTY AND WHAT'S LEFT OF RICK JONES IN UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS.
THE HULK ISN'T ALWAYS WITH US. HE'S BEEN SIGHTED IN JERSEY...
...FIGHTING THE THING ON SOME TROPICAL ISLAND...
I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S HIS STRATEGY OR JUST HIS LIFE.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE PLAN IS. IT'S LIKE WE'RE WAITING TO BE NOTICED.
I HATE HOW FAMILIAR THAT FEELS. ALWAYS BEING ON EDGE.
ALWAYS WAITING FOR THE KNOCK ON THE--
BAM BAM BAM

MCGEE!
IT'S ME! OPEN UP!
GOD.
JOE.
DON'T DO THAT, OKAY? IT WASN'T FUNNY THE FIRST TIME.
YEAH, YEAH.
LISTEN-- WE'RE MOVING TONIGHT.
GOT A LINE ON A PLACE OUTSIDE STOCKTON. SHOULD BE QUIET.
I'LL DROP IN ON THE GOODWILL LATER, GET SOME FRESH CLOTHES--
YOU KNOW...YOU COULD LEAVE ME BEHIND.
IT'D BE EASIER FOR YOU.
WHY DON'T YOU?
WHAT, YOU WANNA GO? GO, ALREADY. I AIN'T STOPPIN' YA.
IT'S BIG DADDY DEVIL WHO WANTS TO PLAY IT SAFE--
SURE. HE'S IN CHARGE. BUT WHY DOES HE CARE?
WHY DOES HE CARE ABOUT ANYONE WHO'S NOT BRUCE?
...HUH.
GOOD QUESTION.
MY BEST GUESS? IT'S 'CAUSE THE BIG GUY LIKES YOU.
THAT'S WHAT WE'RE CALLIN' THE DUMB GREEN JERK NOW, APPARENTLY.
BUT IT'S LIKE WITH MA--YOU WERE KIND TO SALAD-BRAIN EXACTLY ONCE, AND HE'LL NEVER FORGET IT.
OR...I GUESS DEVIL DADDY MAYBE LIKES YOU 'CAUSE YOU TALK BACK AT HIM...
SINNOTT MOTEL
HE SCARES THE HELL OUT OF ME. YOU ALL DO.
AND THEN YOU GIVE HIM CRAP ANYWAY.
HE LIKES THAT.

UH-HUH.
SO WHAT ABOUT YOU?
HA!
NOW WE'RE GETTIN' TO IT!
THE OL' JOE FIXIT CHARM STRIKES AGAIN...
YOU'RE BEING A CREEP TO AVOID THE QUESTION. I NEED TO KNOW WHERE I STAND WITH EVERYONE, JOE.
OKAY. WELL, BANNER DON'T LIKE YOU MUCH. THAT SCORES POINTS WITH ME.
AND...THAT WEEK I HAD CONTROL, I READ A COUPLA YOUR ARTICLES. THE OPINION PIECES.
NORMALLY I AIN'T NO READER, BUT...IT WAS DAYTIME...
...AND THEY WERE PRETTY GOOD. THAT TRANS RIGHTS ONE--THAT WAS REAL GOOD.
I GET THAT...FOLKS WANTING TO BE THEMSELVES...
THING IS--I WASN'T READIN' THE PAPER. I WAS IN THE LIBRARY, USIN' THE COMPUTERS.
SO I GOT TO SEE THE COMMENTS.
AND HOLY CRAP, LADY.
YOU SURE KNOW HOW TO PISS OFF THE PUNY HUMANS.
GREAT. I'M GLAD THE DEATH THREATS I GET ARE SUCH A FUN READ FOR YOU.
YOU KNOW I'M A HUMAN TOO, RIGHT?
DOESN'T MATTER.
YOU AIN'T PUNY.
JOE!

YOU WANNA YELL IT *LOUDER*, BETTS? DON'T THINK FORTEAN *HEARD* YOU--

THERE ARE A LOT OF JOES.

*LOOK.*

GRRUU...

UHRRUUM...

GROOM LAKE.

*UNDERNEATH!* UNDER THE *GROUND!*

*THEY'RE UNDER GROOM LAKE!*

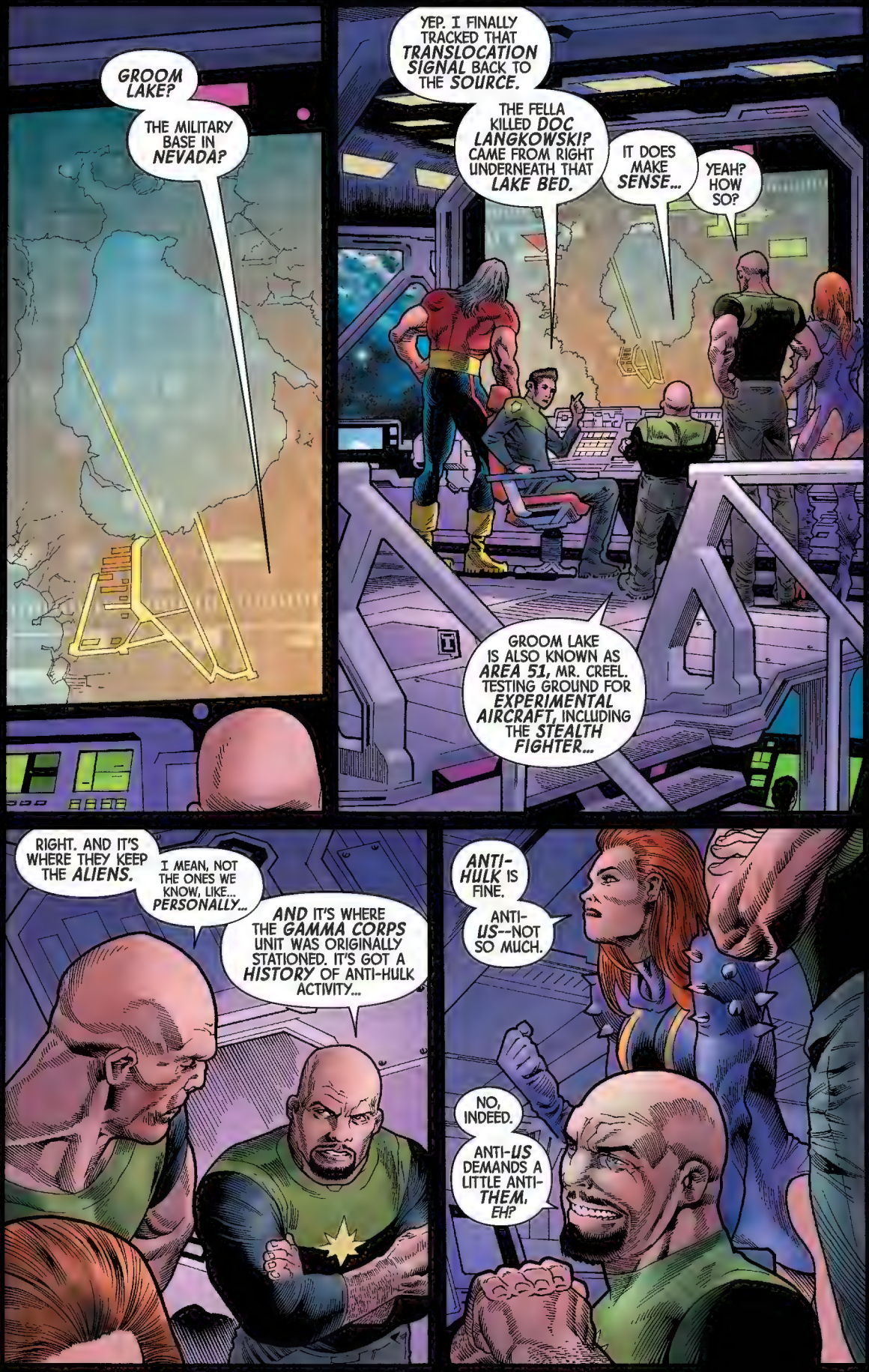
THEY'RE... THEY'RE UNDER...

OH GOD, I *REMEMBER...*

*BRUCE...* I...

I REMEMBER *EVERYTHING*, BRUCE.

I REMEMBER *EVERYTHING THEY DID TO ME...*


GROOM LAKE?
THE MILITARY BASE IN NEVADA?
YEP. I FINALLY TRACKED THAT TRANSLOCATION SIGNAL BACK TO THE SOURCE.
THE FELLA KILLED DOC LANGKOWSKI? CAME FROM RIGHT UNDERNEATH THAT LAKE BED.
IT DOES MAKE SENSE...
YEAH? HOW SO?
GROOM LAKE IS ALSO KNOWN AS AREA 51, MR. CREEL. TESTING GROUND FOR EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT, INCLUDING THE STEALTH FIGHTER...
RIGHT. AND IT'S WHERE THEY KEEP THE ALIENS.
I MEAN, NOT THE ONES WE KNOW, LIKE... PERSONALLY...
AND IT'S WHERE THE GAMMA CORPS UNIT WAS ORIGINALLY STATIONED. IT'S GOT A HISTORY OF ANTI-HULK ACTIVITY...
ANTI-HULK IS FINE.
ANTI-US--NOT SO MUCH.
NO, INDEED.
ANTI-US DEMANDS A LITTLE ANTI-THEM, EH?

SO, THAT TELEPORT THING THEY DID--CAN WE DO THAT TOO?
GET THE DROP ON 'EM. I LIKE IT.
THAT'S THE PLAN. ALPHA FLIGHT HAS A TRANSLOCATION RIG OF ITS OWN--STRICTLY EMERGENCIES, OBVIOUSLY.
IT'S BEYOND DANGEROUS...
...UNLESS YOU'VE GOT DATA ON ANOTHER TRANSLOCATION STATION TO LOCK ONTO, EH?
GREAT.
SO WE'RE JUST--WHAT? WALKING IN THERE?
BREAKING IN THERE, SAMSON.
BREAKING SOME HEADS IN THERE--RIGHT, LEGS?
YOU KNOW IT, BABY.
WE'RE DOING AS WE WERE DONE BY, DOC.
A SURPRISE ATTACK. CARL AND MARY--DISRUPT AND DISTRACT. BREAK HEADS. MAKE A NICE MESS.
MYSELF AND SAMSON WILL GATHER EVIDENCE OF WHAT THIS FORTEAN CHARACTER'S BEEN UP TO--
--OR IDEALLY, GATHER THE MAN HIMSELF.
THAT SIMPLE?
WHAT IF THEY KNOW WE'RE COMING?
PLEASE.
THEY'D HAVE TO BE PSYCHIC.

WE ARE.

REMOTE VIEWING. THE MILITARY APPLICATIONS WERE FIRST EXPLORED BY THE RUSSIANS DURING THE COLD WAR.

BUT WE CLOSED THE GAP QUICKLY.

OUR NEW WAVE OF PSYCHIC SURVEILLANCE TECHNICIANS CAN REACH ANYWHERE.

ONCE WE HAVE A LOCATION--EVEN IN ORBIT--WE HAVE ABSOLUTE INFORMATIONAL CAPACITY.

WE KNEW YOU WERE COMING BEFORE YOU DID.

HELL YEAH, GENERAL.

THIS IS SO COOL.

INCIDENTALLY, DR. SAMSON-- IT'S FASCINATING TO SEE YOU UP AND ABOUT SO QUICKLY. YOUR RECOVERY PERIOD SEEMS TO GET SHORTER EACH TIME.
I'LL MAKE SURE DR. McGOWAN CONCENTRATES ON THAT ASPECT WHEN SHE DISSECTS YOU.
FORTEAN... FOR GOD'S SAKE, LOOK AT YOURSELF.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
WHY... WHY WOULD YOU...?
TO WIN A WAR, SAMSON.
TO BRING ORDER TO A WORLD WITHOUT IT.
ALTHOUGH I REALIZE THAT'S NOT AS HEROIC AS DESTROYING YOUR LIFE TO IMPRESS YOUR PATIENT'S GIRLFRIEND...
I KNOW. IT WASN'T WORTH IT THEN--AND IT ISN'T WORTH IT NOW.
NOTHING'S WORTH...THIS...
LORD, DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT YOU'VE LOST...?
I'LL KNOW ONCE MY SCIENCE TEAM GIVES ME THE DATA.
ONCE YOU'VE BEEN TAKEN APART... FILED AND INDEXED WITH ALL THE OTHER MUTATES.
AND ONCE WE'RE READY, WE'LL FINALLY BRING DOWN THE--
BOOM
BOOM

BOOM
BOOM
HEH.
...
YOU'RE SO HOT RIGHT NOW.
BOOM
YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET.
BOOM
KRKK-KRAKK
BOOM
HOW...
HOW DID HE...?
"ONCE WE'RE READY," YOU SAID.
NOBODY'S EVER READY.
BOOM

# WHO'S THERE

23

"LET YOUR PLANS BE DARK AND IMPENETRABLE AS NIGHT."

– SUN TZU
*THE ART OF WAR*

YEARS AGO.
EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM
HULK WARNING
DO NOT LOOK THE CREATURE IN THE EYE.
REPEAT.
IF YOU ARE RECEIVING THIS EMERGENCY BROADCAST, THE CREATURE KNOWN AS THE HULK HAS BEEN SIGHTED IN YOUR AREA.
EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM
HULK WARNING
EVACUATE YOUR HOMES IMMEDIATELY. LEAVE EVERYTHING BEHIND.
THE CREATURE IS DRIVEN BY RAGE.
THIS...THIS ISN'T REAL, IS IT, DADDY?
I...I DON'T KNOW, BABY GIRL.
I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST A SHOW...BUT...
...BUT IT JUST KEEPS GOING.
IT IS CAPABLE OF MASS DESTRUCTION.
IF YOU SEE THE CREATURE-- OR IF IT SEES YOU-- REMAIN STILL.
UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES DRAW UNDUE ATTENTION TO YOURSELF.
I--I THINK MAYBE WE NEED TO--
DO NOT LOOK THE CREATURE IN THE EYE.

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT CATCH ME OUT SOMETIMES.

THE DINNER COOKING IN THE OVEN. THE MATH HOMEWORK, HALF DONE.

THE *LOOK* IN DADDY'S EYES, DAYS LATER, AFTER A MAN WITH A KIND, KIND FACE SAID OUR INSURANCE DIDN'T *COVER* IT.

THAT IT WAS AN ACT OF GOD.

AN ACT OF *GOD.*

AND THE LOOK IN *HIS* EYE. IN THE EYE THE TV SAID NEVER TO LOOK AT.

NOT JUST RAGE. A *CHILD'S* RAGE. A CHILD'S *PAIN AND TRAUMA.*

HE DIDN'T *KNOW.*

DADDY HAD HIS FIRST *HEART ATTACK* A FEW YEARS LATER.

THE SAME DAY HULK GOT HIS *PARDON.* HIS PARADE AND HIS STATUE.

I HAD THIS FANTASY OF *CONFRONTING* THE HULK ONE DAY.

ASKING WHERE *OUR* PARADE WAS. *OUR* STATUE, FOR SURVIVING *HIM.*

**NOW.**

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR.

SHADOW BASE SITE B.

I GOT A *JOURNALISM DEGREE* AT ARIZONA STATE, ON A SCHOLARSHIP AWARD. I BURIED MY *FATHER* THAT YEAR, BUT I GOT THAT DEGREE.

AND WHEN THE TIME CAME, I *FOUND* THE HULK. I ASKED HIM PRETTY MUCH THAT *EXACT QUESTION.*

AND HE THOUGHT IT WAS GOOD.

WHEN I LOOKED HIM IN THE EYE, WHAT I SAW *THIS* TIME...IT WASN'T PAIN. IT WASN'T *TRAUMA.*

THERE WAS *RAGE* THERE. A HELL OF A LOT OF IT.

BUT IT WAS *DIRECTED.*

THIS HULK KNEW *EXACTLY* WHAT HE WAS DOING.

AND WHO TO DO IT *TO.*

*FALL BACK!* EVERYONE *FALL BACK!*

GET SOME *RANGE--*

MAYBE THAT'S WHAT SCARES ME THE *MOST* THIS TIME.

THAT THERE'S A *PLAN* TO ALL THIS.

JACKIE.

THAT I HELPED COME UP WITH IT.

TIME TO GO.

BETTY BANNER SNIFFS THE AIR FOR GAMMA SIGNATURES. I'VE SEEN HER DO IT BEFORE--IT'S HOW WE FOUND THE HULK.
THIS WAY.
NOT LIKE AN ANIMAL. NOT LIKE SHE'S SCENTING PREY.
LIKE SOMEONE WHO JUST STEPPED OFF THE TRAIN THAT BROUGHT THEM HOME. SMELLING FAMILIAR AIR.
THAT WAS FORTEAN DOWN THERE. THE GENERAL. THAT THING, THE ABOMINATION-- IT HAD HIS FACE.
YEAH. AND I CAN GUESS HOW.
IN THE VIDEOS OF HIS OLD CONCERTS, RICK JONES IS PLAYFUL. ALL JOKES AND CELEBRITY ANECDOTES.
HIS VOICE HASN'T REALLY CHANGED. WHATEVER HE'S GOING THROUGH, HE WON'T LET IT SHOW.
BUT HIS FACE...
THAT GUY WAS A LOST CAUSE WHEN HE...
WHEN HE MADE ME INTO...
A SUDDEN REALIZATION:
HE'S MY AGE.
I MEAN, IF ANYTHING, THIS MAKES IT EASIER, RIGHT?
I FIGURE THE PLAN'S GOING PRETTY WELL.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THAT.
THE DISTRACTION PART, ANYWAY...
YES.

ARE WE HAVING FUN YET?
HE LIKES THE ATTENTION.
THIS WAY.

GREAT. SO WE'RE HELPING THE HULK NOW?
LOOKS LIKE.
GET BEHIND ME.
TRANQUILIZER UNITS--TARGET THE ABSORBING MAN AND TITANIA!
BRING THEM DOWN!
PHUTT PHUTT PHUTT
FENTANYL IN A TITANIUM NEEDLE.
SMART. I AIN'T GOOD WITH DRUGS.
ONLY THE NEEDLE HITS BEFORE THE DRUG DOES. THE TITANIUM PART.
AND THIS TIME...I WAS READY.
OH.
CRAP.

VERY CLEVER.
TRANQUILIZER UNITS--REPORT STATUS.
WE--WE'RE OUT, SIR! AMMO'S DRY!
YEAH? AIN'T THAT A SHAME--
THEN RETREAT AND REGROUP. I CAN HANDLE CREEL.
HEY!
S-E UNIT--TARGET THE HULK.
YEAH, TARGET ME. SEE HOW THAT WORKS OUT.
WHAT THE HELL'S AN "S-E UNIT" ANYWAY--
SOLAR EMITTER.
HOLD STILL.
FWAAASHH
AAARRRHH!

THAT'S IT... IT'LL ALL BE OVER SOON, BANNER...

N-NO! IT'S NOT--NOT MY TIME--

FIGHT IT, HULK--

CARL! ABSORB HIM ALREADY--

I C-CAN'T-- HE--

HE AIN'T RIGHT-- INSIDE--

HEAVY UNITS--GO FULL AUTO.

WE'LL BAG THE PIECES WHEN WE'RE DONE.

SIR, YES SIR.

FIGHT IT

FIGHT

NO-- STOP--

B-CHOOM B-CHOOM B-CHOOM

NNAAARHH--

OH, SAMSON.

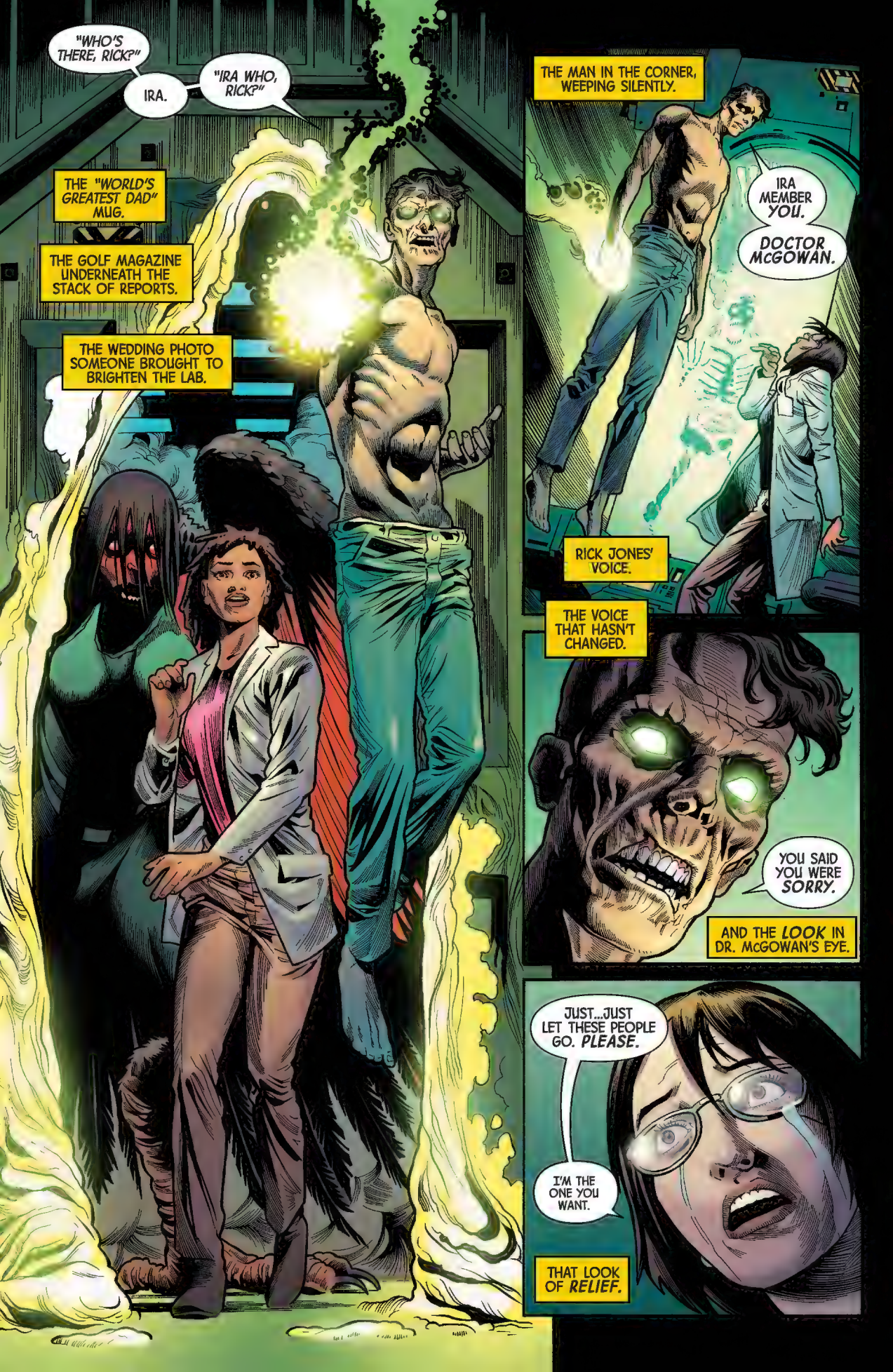
ALL RIGHT, BOYS. JUST SO YOU KNOW?

I WAS HAPPY TO DO THIS THE NICE WAY.

A SOCK ON THE JAW. A SLAP ON THE WRIST.
BUT *THEN*-- *UNNH*--YOU *ANNOYED* ME.
NOT AS SMART AS YOU *LOOK*, EH?

TELL THEM PUCK SENT YOU.
THEY KNOW ME DOWN THERE.
KRUNNCH
M-MY TIME...IT'S... MY TIME...
AND BANNER SAID...
BANNER... SAID TO FIGHT.
SO I'M ONLY OBEYING ORDERS!

--ONLY OBEYING ORDERS!
SKLUTCH
I KNEW THAT WOULDN'T WORK.
DR....DR. McGOWAN?
HM?
WE...WE ARE SAFE IN HERE, AREN'T WE?
DR. McGOWAN...?
KNOCK, KNOCK.
IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS I NOTICE.


"WHO'S THERE, RICK?"
IRA.
"IRA WHO, RICK?"
THE "WORLD'S GREATEST DAD" MUG.
THE GOLF MAGAZINE UNDERNEATH THE STACK OF REPORTS.
THE WEDDING PHOTO SOMEONE BROUGHT TO BRIGHTEN THE LAB.
THE MAN IN THE CORNER, WEEPING SILENTLY.
IRA MEMBER YOU.
DOCTOR MCGOWAN.
RICK JONES' VOICE.
THE VOICE THAT HASN'T CHANGED.
YOU SAID YOU WERE SORRY.
AND THE LOOK IN DR. MCGOWAN'S EYE.
JUST...JUST LET THESE PEOPLE GO. PLEASE.
I'M THE ONE YOU WANT.
THAT LOOK OF RELIEF.

I--I DESERVE THIS.
I DESERVE EVERYTHING THAT'S COMING TO ME, BUT MY TEAM...THEY WERE ONLY...
THEY WERE JUST DOING THEIR JOBS.
IT'S OKAY. NOBODY'S GOING TO HURT ANYONE HERE.
ARE THEY, RICK?
I DON'T KNOW IF YOU CAN PROMISE THAT, MS. McGEE.
I THINK IT DEPENDS ON THAT GUY.
MY STOMACH FLIPS OVER.
YES. THAT'S WHAT I COULD SMELL. THE BOY IN THE TUBE...
WAS THIS YOU?
N-NO. WE-- WE FOUND HIM LIKE THAT. OR BANNER FOUND HIM AND TIPPED US OFF.
HE'D SPENT MONTHS IN A GRAVE. HIS MIND WAS...IS...IT'S GONE.
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO EASE HIS PAIN.
...
WELL, THAT GOES A LONG WAY WITH ME.
RICK'S FEET TOUCH THE FLOOR, AND I START BREATHING AGAIN.
HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT McGOWAN. I WAS RIGHT ABOUT HIM.

THE PLAN IS STILL HOLDING TOGETHER.
OUR SIDE OF IT, AT LEAST.
CARL--
KEEP OSCILLATING THE THERMAL FREQUENCY! DON'T GIVE HIM A CHANCE TO BECOME THE ENERGY!
CREEL'S THE MOST DANGEROUS-- BUT ONLY IF HE CAN USE HIS HEAD!
KRAKK
A WEAKNESS WE ALL SHARE, EH?
AAAAHH!
GOT HER WHILE HER BACK WAS TURNED, SIR.
TITANIA IS DOWN--
CARL--CARL, YOU GOTTA PULL YOURSELF BACK TOGETHER, BABY--
CARL, WAKE UP-- WAKE--
SCREEN

--AND SO IS PUCK.
ARRGHH--
SHREEK
ONCE WE TOOK SAMSON OUT, IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF TIME.
NATURALLY. THEY'RE "HEROES" AND "VILLAINS"--NO MATCH FOR ORDERED DISCIPLINE AND PROPER EQUIPMENT--
DON'T KID YOURSELF, FORTEAN. ALL YOUR TIN SOLDIERS-- YOUR TOYS, YOUR TRICKS--
--YOU'RE JUST A DIME-STORE VERSION OF ROSS. A DIME-STORE VERSION OF BLONSKY.
A DIME-STORE VERSION OF ME!
OH, NO.
I'M THE UPGRADE, MONSTER. THE SUPERIOR WEAPON.
YOU WANT A TRICK?
HERE--HH-- HHCCHHH--
KHOORRP
BUT THERE'S THAT OTHER SIDE.

HNNGGH!
HRRRGH!
HGGGGGGGS
THE PLAN WE DIDN'T MAKE.
ON MY SIGNAL-- FULL POWER. PUT HIM DOWN LIKE THE ANIMAL HE IS.
HE'S FINISHED.
HE'S...
HRRRR...
THE PLAN WE COULDN'T MAKE.
HRRAAARRRH!
SHRRIP
BECAUSE THE ONE THING NOBODY'S EVER BEEN ABLE TO DO...

# THE FACE OF THE ENEMY

24

– STAN LEE & JACK KIRBY, "GALACTUS: THE ORIGIN"

EONS AGO.
AT THE END OF ALL THINGS.
Galan of Taa.
TAC
TAC
TAC
TAC
TAC
TAC
Can you hear me?
...we two will become a new form of life.
I am the Sentience of the Cosmos, and you are its last survivor.
You have been baptized in the energies of creation...and now...
THERE ARE TWO PEOPLE IN EVERY MIRROR.

YEARS AGO.

WE *HAD* TO DO IT.

WE *HAD* TO BE THE *FIRST.*

WE'RE REACHING THE *COSMIC STORM AREA...*

IN A FEW SECONDS, WE WILL FINALLY LEARN WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE POWERFUL GAMMA RAYS ARE RELEASED--

*WAIT! WHAT'S THAT...?*

IT'S THE COSMIC RAYS! I--I WARNED YOU ABOUT 'EM!

PAK

TAC

TAC

TAC

TAC

THEY'RE PENETRATING THE SHIP!

COME ON, YOU FOOL!

WE'VE GOT TO REACH THE PROTECTIVE TRENCH--

*THREE.*

*TWO.*

*ONE.*

*ZERO.*

THERE'S THE ONE YOU CAN SEE.

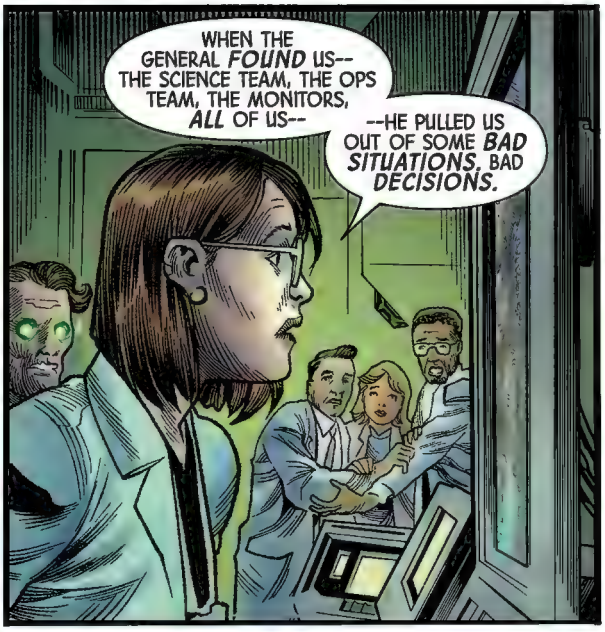
THE ONE YOU THINK YOU KNOW.

AND THEN THERE'S THE OTHER ONE.
HULK.
ZHNASH.
NOW.
MOVE TO OPPOSITE FLANKS.
SIR...?
ON MY MARK, HIT THE MONSTER WITH ALTERNATING BLASTS.

WE'LL GOAD IT. DIVIDE ITS ATTENTION.
THE STRESS I JUST PUT IT UNDER WILL HAVE PUT THE CHILD-SELF IN CONTROL. THE "SAVAGE HULK."
IT'S STRONGER-- ANGRIER--
--BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE THE BRAINPOWER TO STRATEGIZE AGAINST A SUPERIOR--
HNH.
YOU DON'T ZHAY.
OH LORD--
HUSSSSSSS
--NYAAARRHH!

HHGIG GUY'ZH STILL INZHIDE. YOU GOT HGEE TO DEAL HRIZH.
HGUT I ANG ANGRY. HREAL ANGRY.
AND ZHE ANGRIER I GET...
WAAAAAAAM
...YOU KNOW ZHE REZHT.
"LOOK WHAT HE'S DONE TO HIMSELF."

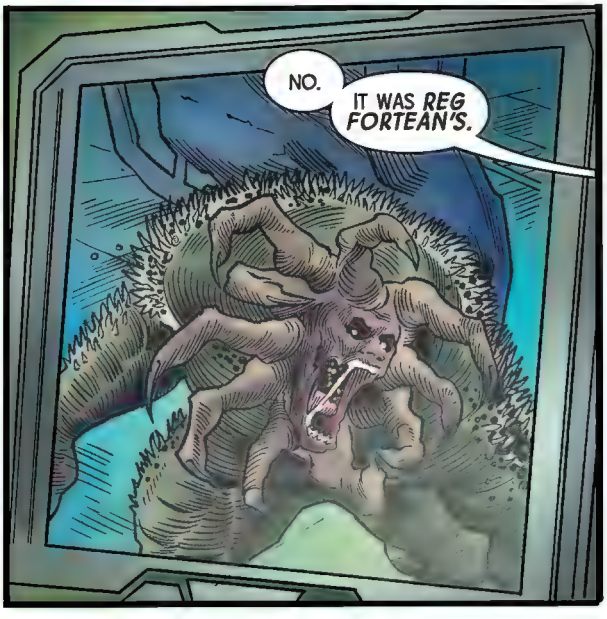
HE'S DESTROYED HIMSELF. AND NOW YOU WANT ME TO DESTROY HIM AGAIN?
I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN DO THAT.


WHEN THE GENERAL FOUND US-- THE SCIENCE TEAM, THE OPS TEAM, THE MONITORS, ALL OF US--
--HE PULLED US OUT OF SOME BAD SITUATIONS, BAD DECISIONS.

I...WAS FIRED FROM CALTECH. DRINK AND DRUGS. I ENDED UP WORKING IN AN MGH LAB.
IT WAS UGLY WORK, BUT...ONCE YOU'RE IN, THERE'S NO OUT.
THEN DAREDEVIL HAPPENED, AND I WENT TO JAIL.

AND...AND IF NOT FOR REG FORTEAN...
I GET IT.
FORTEAN HAD YOUR BACK. HE GAVE YOU A LIFE AGAIN.

YOU STILL TRUST HIM.
MORE THAN YOU TRUST A COUPLE OF MONSTERS AND THE WOMAN YOU TRIED TO KILL...
I'M SORRY.
THAT WASN'T MY DECISION.


NO.
IT WAS REG FORTEAN'S.

"IS THAT THE SAME REG YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW, DOCTOR?
SIR! REINFORCEMENTS AVAILABLE!
WE'RE RELOADED AND READY TO--
HHOORR
NO--
"OR HAS HE BECOME SOMEONE ELSE?
AAEEEIIIGH--
"SOMEONE YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW?"

OH GOD.
DID... DID HE JUST...
S-SIR... EULER AND CORTEZ, YOU...
YOU... KILLED THEM...
AN...AN ACCIDENT. THEIR OWN FAULT. THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE CAREFUL.
THIS... THIS IS WAR, COLONEL.
FRIENDLY FIRE IS WHAT HAPPENS.
ZHURE.
NNTIL YOU RUN OUTTA HRIENDZH...
ALL P-PERSONNEL-- THIS...THIS IS DR. CHARLENE MCGOWAN, HEAD OF SCIENCE DIVISION.

I AM HEREBY RELIEVING GENERAL FORTEAN OF HIS COMMAND. HE--HE'S NO LONGER IN HIS RIGHT MIND.
HE'S NOT THE GENERAL WE KNOW.
I MEAN... SHE IS SECOND IN COMMAND...
SHE'S RIGHT, MAN. THAT THING...IT AIN'T THE GENERAL NO MORE.
I ALMOST HOPE THE HULK WINS...
ALL PERSONNEL-- STAND DOWN IMMEDIATELY.
NO. NO. NO!
THERE. NO GOING BACK-- I'M SHADOW BASE NOW.
...HOW DO YOU THINK HE'LL TAKE IT?
NNNAAAARRHH!
YOU!

I'LL DESTROY YOU--I'LL--
HHCCHH--
--HHOAAARRGH!
HHAAHHR!
NO--LET GO, YOU DAMNED-- MONSTER--
YOU'RE DYING-- YOU'RE--
--ALREADY DEAD--HHRKK--
ALREADY--
ALREADY
DEAD

YOU'RE ALREADY DEAD.
WHAT...
WHAT *IS* THIS?
*THIS* IS WHERE YOU'VE *ALWAYS BEEN.* WHERE *ALL OF US* HAVE ALWAYS BEEN.
*WELCOME,* GENERAL FORTEAN. WELCOME, WELCOME.
WELCOME TO OUR LITTLE *FAMILY.*
I'M *SORRY,* GENERAL. I'M SO SORRY.
BUT I DID TRY TO WARN YOU.
SAMSON?
IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION, I DON'T THINK THIS *LASTS.*
I...FEEL AS IF I'VE TRIED TO STAY *LONGER.* TO MOVE *PAST* THIS PLACE...TO BE... *CLEANSED...*
ANYWAY. I SUPPOSE NOW WE BOTH KNOW HOW IT'S *DONE.*
NO. *NO.*
I--I DON'T *WANT* THIS--I'D NEVER HAVE--
THIS IS... MY *SOUL...*
*HA HA HA!* ISN'T THIS *FUN?* SO *MANY* OF US-- IT'S LIKE A *PARTY!*
YOU'VE *OUTDONE YOURSELF,* BRUCE!
BRUCE AIN'T *HERE,* DAD.
IT'S *JOE.*
WHAT--
KRAAKK
PARTY'S OVER.

GENERAL-- GENERAL, WAKE UP--
GENERAL--
WHA--
SORRY, PAL.
SMAT
YOUR BOSS AIN'T COMING BACK.
AAHH--
WHUMMP
...WAS THAT NECESSARY?
YEAH, YEAH. WELCOME BACK, SAMSON.
GO WAIT WITH THE OTHER GOOD GUYS. BY THE TIME THEY WAKE UP, WE'LL ALL BE OUTTA YOUR HAIR.

"WE"? YOU AND BETTY AND RICK?
AND ANYONE ELSE WHO WANTS TO.
SHADOW BASE JUST CAME UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT. AND MCGOWAN'S GOT A GUILTY CONSCIENCE--YOU COULD HEAR IT IN HER VOICE.
WE GET HER ON OUR SIDE, WE GOT A BILLION-DOLLAR BLACK BUDGET AND TECH AND BASES NOBODY KNOWS ABOUT.
THEN WE CAN REALLY GET TO WORK.
NICE CHAIR...
YOU WANT TO...TAKE OVER SHADOW BASE? HULK, THESE PEOPLE SIGNED UP TO HUNT YOU--
FORTEAN DID. FROM WHAT JONES SAID, MCGOWAN AIN'T THE SAME WAY. HER, I CAN DEAL WITH.
AND WHAT DO YOU CARE? AIN'T YOU WITH CREEL AND THE REST?
...I DON'T THINK THEY NEED ME AROUND. NOT THE WAY YOU DO.
SOMEONE NEEDS TO KEEP AN EYE ON YOU, HULK.
FINE. JUST DON'T GET IN THE WAY.
BANNER'S WITH ME ON THIS. SO'S THE BIG GUY--EVEN FIXIT'S COMING AROUND.
IF WE WORK TOGETHER? WE'RE THE STRONGEST AND THE SMARTEST ONE THERE IS.

# THE STEEL THRONE

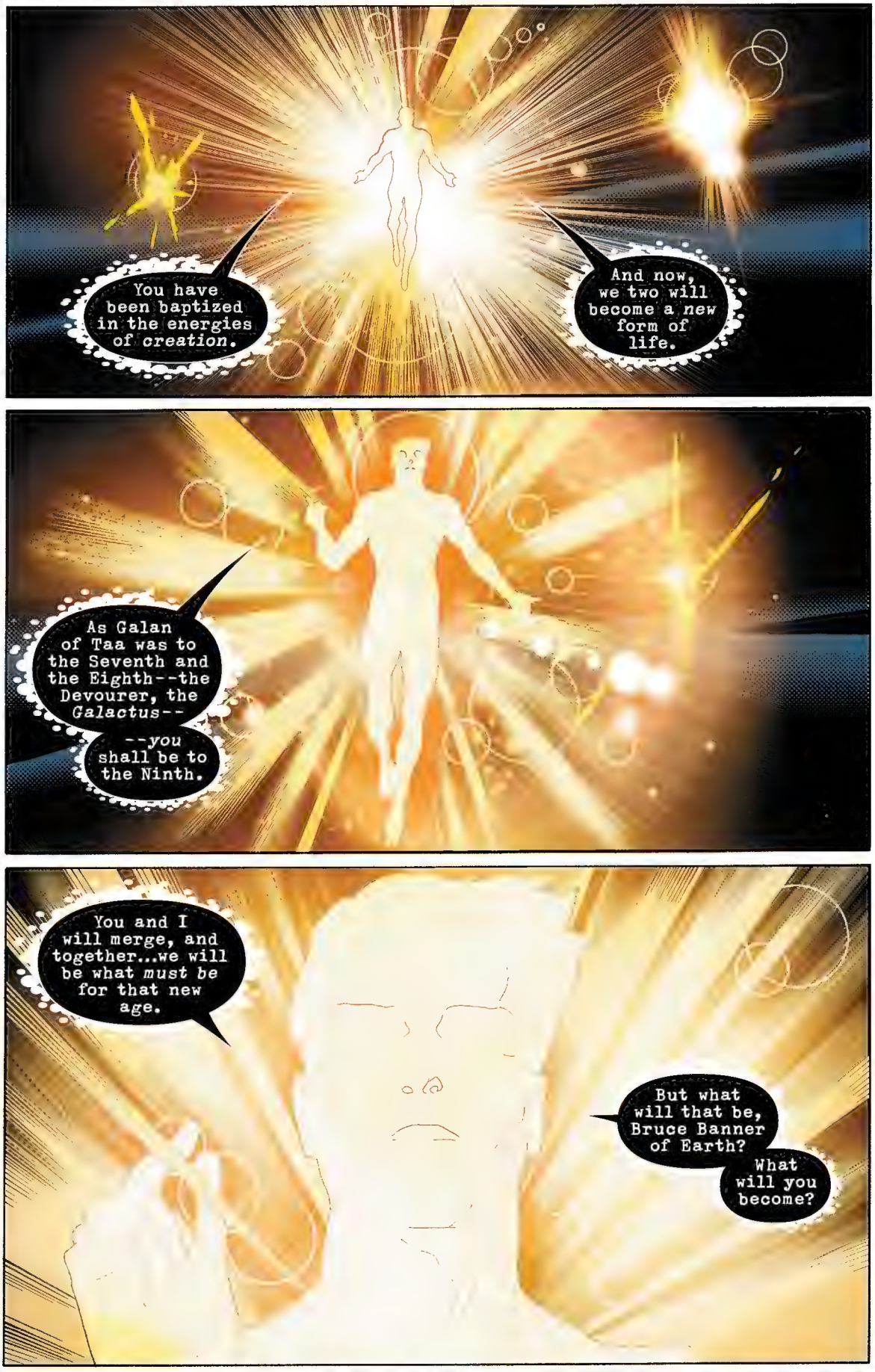
**EONS FROM NOW.**

**AT THE END OF ALL THINGS.**

Bruce Banner
of Earth.

I am the
Sentience of the Cosmos...

...and you are its
last survivor.

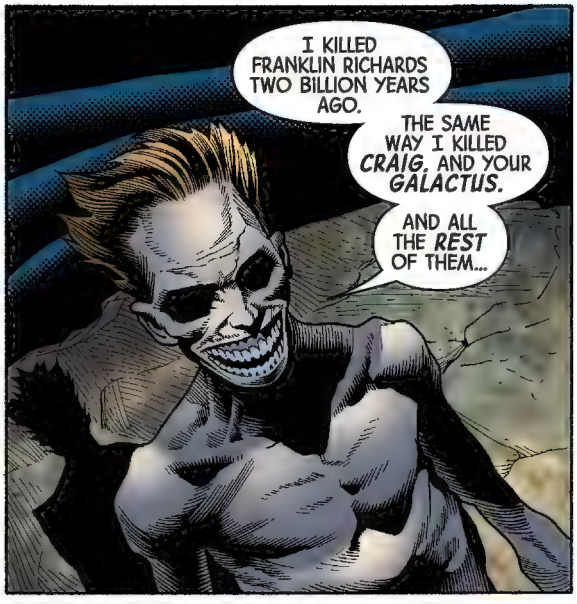

You have been baptized in the energies of *creation*.
And now, we two will become a *new* form of life.
As Galan of Taa was to the Seventh and the Eighth--the Devourer, the *Galactus*--
--*you* shall be to the Ninth.
You and I will merge, and together...we will be what *must be* for that new age.
But what will that be, Bruce Banner of Earth?
What will you become?

What will you...
...
Who is that?

WHO?
"MR. IMMORTAL"?

HIS REAL NAME WAS CRAIG.
HE WAS... HOMO SUPREME. THE ULTIMATE EVOLUTION OF MUTANT POWER.

HE THOUGHT THAT MADE HIM SPECIAL.
BUT IN THE END, HE WAS JUST A BACKUP. SOMEONE TO STAND HERE, MEET YOU, DO...THIS...
...IF THE ANOINTED PRINCE, FRANKLIN RICHARDS, COULDN'T MAKE IT.


I KILLED FRANKLIN RICHARDS TWO BILLION YEARS AGO.
THE SAME WAY I KILLED CRAIG, AND YOUR GALACTUS.
AND ALL THE REST OF THEM...

...
How?

LIKE THIS.

NO!

No, this isn't--this isn't *right!*

This isn't how it happens!

This isn't what's *meant* to be!

Something is wrong with--with *everything*--

SOMETHING IS WRONG--

THERE ARE TWO PEOPLE IN EVERY MIRROR.

THERE'S THE ONE YOU CAN SEE.

AND THERE'S THE OTHER ONE.

THE ONE YOU DON'T WANT TO.

*AVENGERS #684* VARIANT BY
SKOTTIE YOUNG

#1 REMASTERED VARIANT BY SAL BUSCEMA,
ALFREDO ALCALA & EBER EVANGELISTA

#1 VARIANT BY
CLAYTON CRAIN

#2 VARIANT BY
GERARDO ZAFFINO

25

Par%l sails the black in search of color.

The cabin of the farsail is alive with chroma, all the permitted hues glowing and twinkling -- cerise shimmering into cyan, magenta bleeding to a deep gold.

Par%l's own membrane pulses in response, glittering sunstones deep in soft, rich aqua. Hir nucleus waxes and wanes, revolving slowly inside the gel of hir underskeleton.

Hir manipulators pass through the magnetic fields of the controls once, then twice, reading their patterns.

Confirming what is already known.

There is no color here.
No stars remain to shine.
No planets hold life.
All is destroyed.

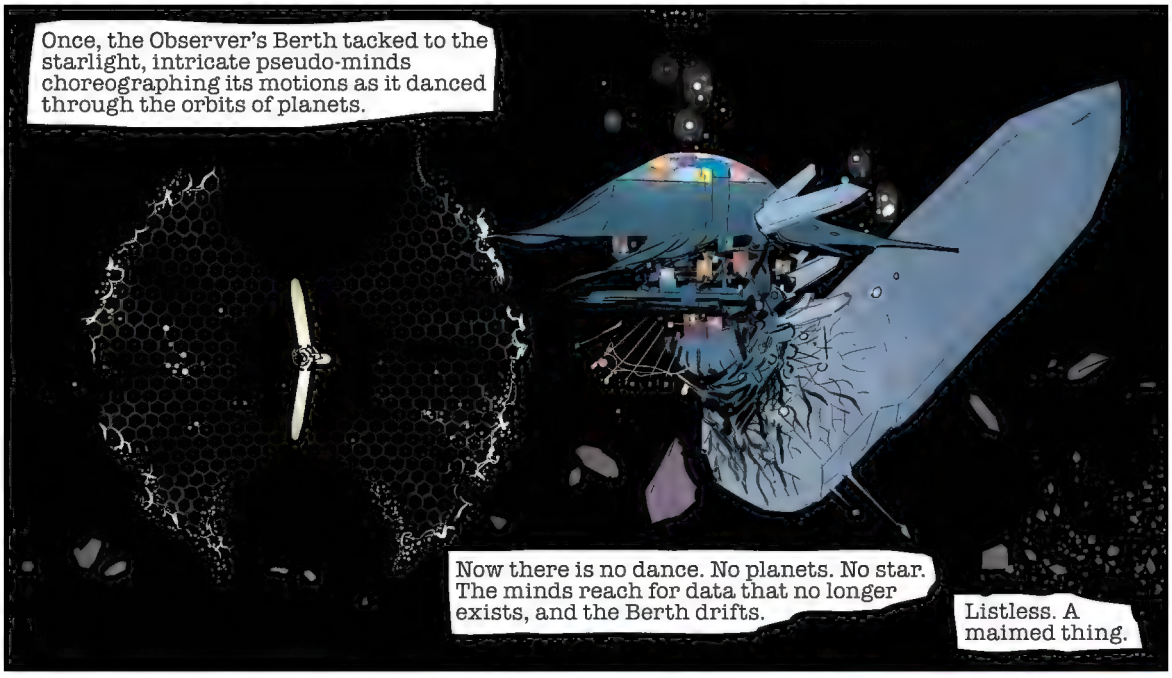
These worlds are broken.

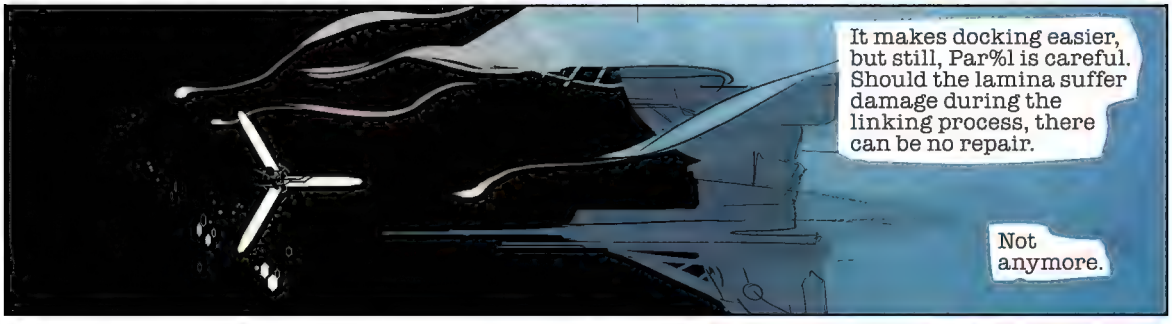
All the worlds are broken.

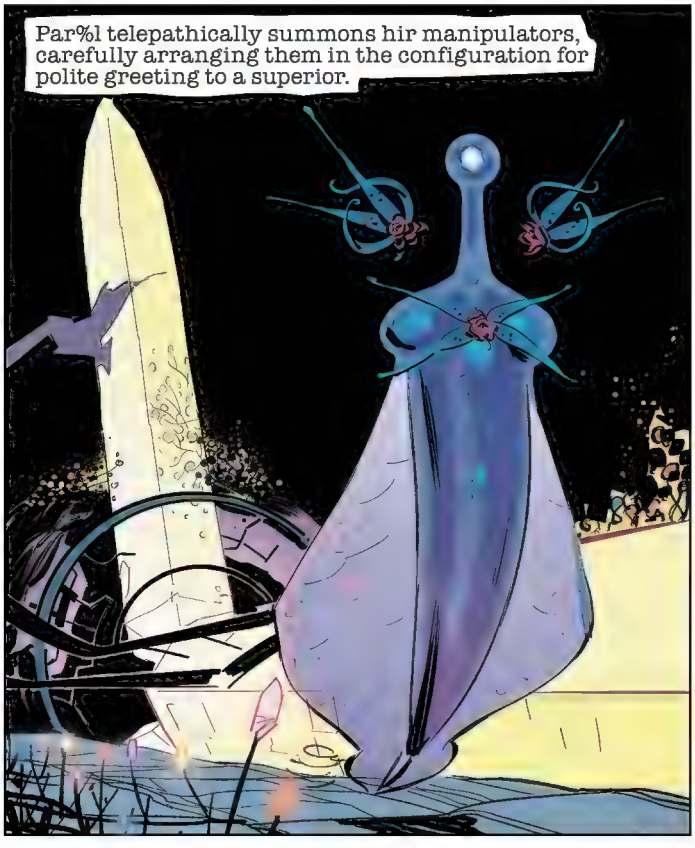
# BREAKER OF WORLDS

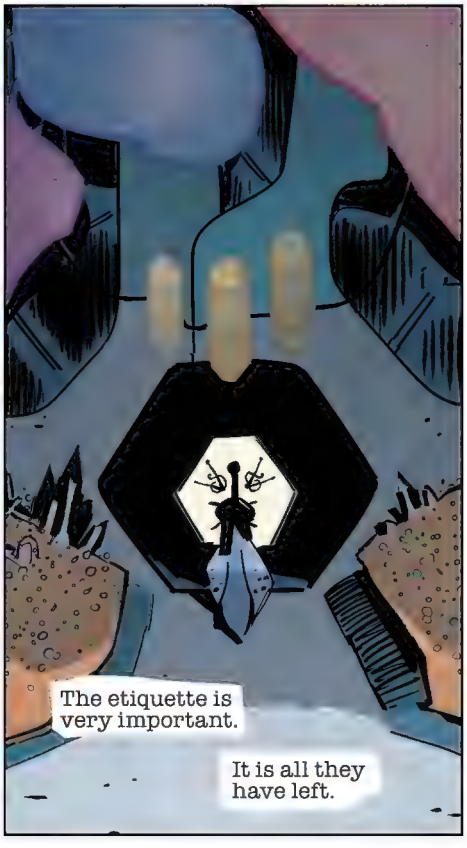
"IT IS A FEARFUL THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD."

– HEBREWS 10:31

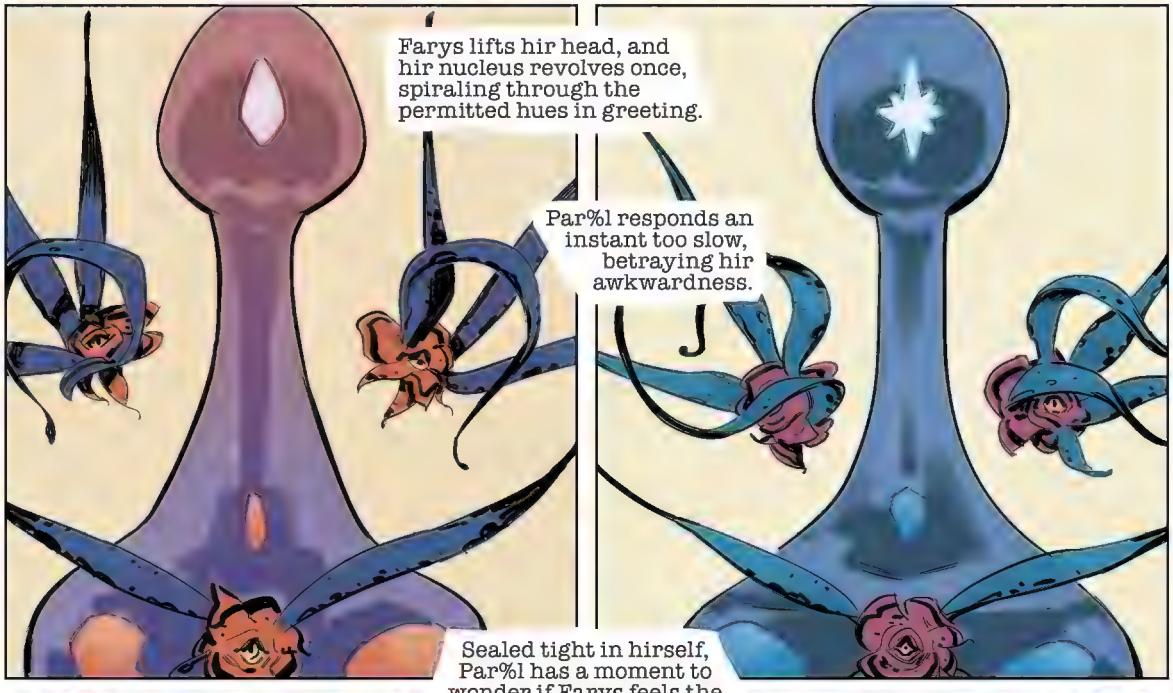

Once, the Observer's Berth tacked to the starlight, intricate pseudo-minds choreographing its motions as it danced through the orbits of planets.
Now there is no dance. No planets. No star. The minds reach for data that no longer exists, and the Berth drifts.
Listless. A maimed thing.

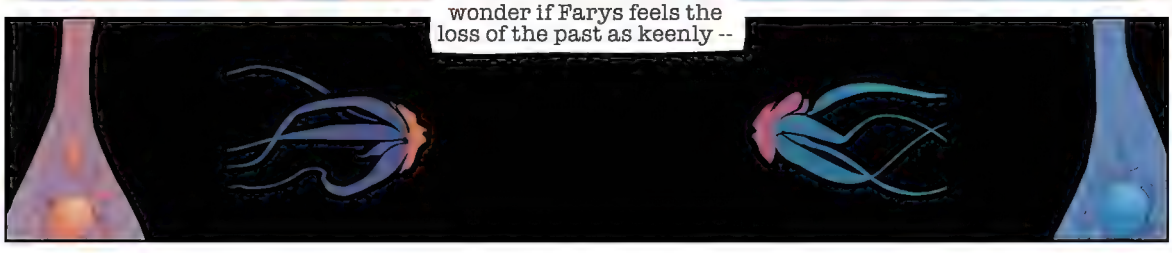

It makes docking easier, but still, Par%l is careful. Should the lamina suffer damage during the linking process, there can be no repair.
Not anymore.


Par%l telepathically summons hir manipulators, carefully arranging them in the configuration for polite greeting to a superior.

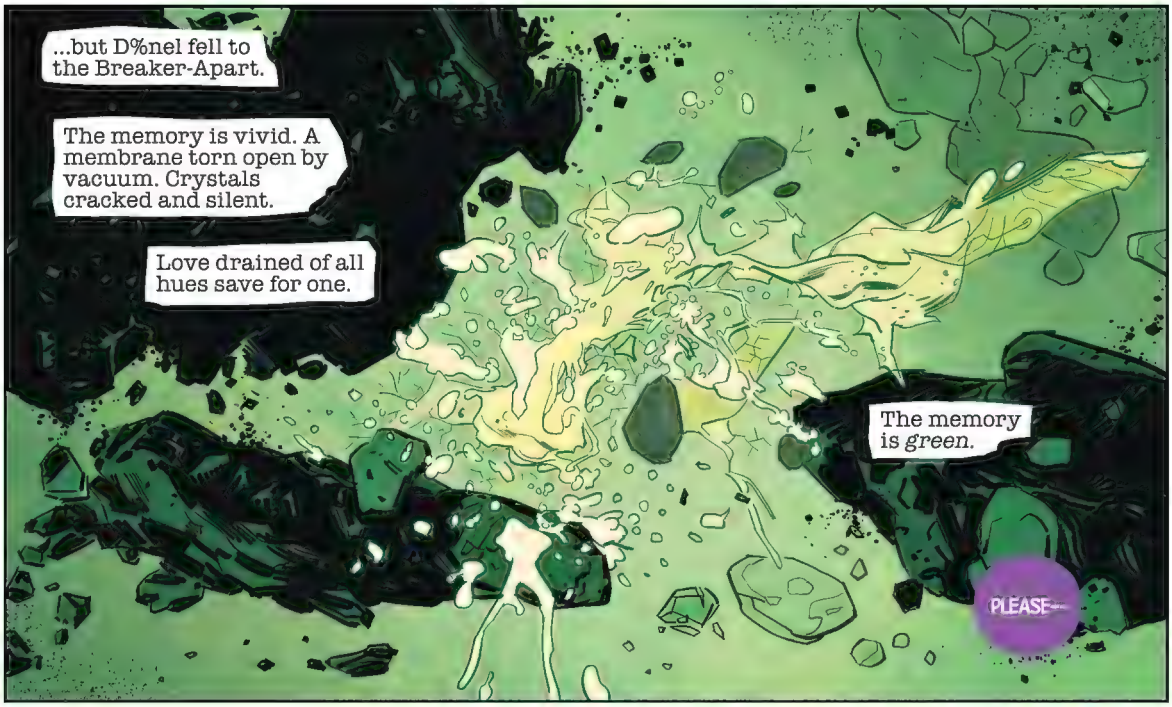

The etiquette is very important.
It is all they have left.

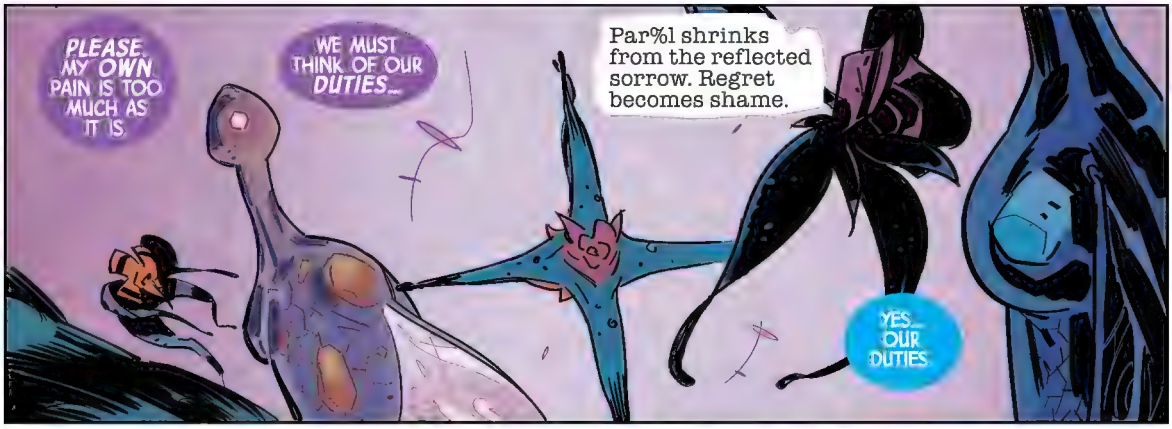
Par%l and Farys were lovers, once.


Farys lifts hir head, and hir nucleus revolves once, spiraling through the permitted hues in greeting.
Par%l responds an instant too slow, betraying hir awkwardness.
J


Sealed tight in hirself, Par%l has a moment to wonder if Farys feels the loss of the past as keenly --

-- before contact is made.
NOW WE TWO ARE ONE
YES...
...WE TWO...
Par%l regrets the thought as soon as it crosses to the shared mindspace. They were lovers, once...
...but it takes more than two to love.
D%nel was their bondmaker, guiding them together, firmly, carefully, opening them all to one another.
Forming the triune. Creating the communion.
D%nel was the space where love could be...


...but D%nel fell to the Breaker-Apart.
The memory is vivid. A membrane torn open by vacuum. Crystals cracked and silent.
Love drained of all hues save for one.
The memory is *green*.
PLEASE...


PLEASE... MY *OWN* PAIN IS TOO MUCH AS IT IS.
WE MUST THINK OF OUR *DUTIES*...
Par%l shrinks from the reflected sorrow. Regret becomes shame.
YES... OUR DUTIES.

WHAT HAVE YOU OBSERVED OUT HERE? I KNOW WE CAN'T GET CLOSE TO IT, BUT... DID YOU *SEE* IT?
IS THERE... CAN THE CREATURE BE *STOPPED*?

NO, PAR%L. NO, IT CANNOT BE STOPPED.
IT WILL NEVER STOP MAKING US *PAY*.

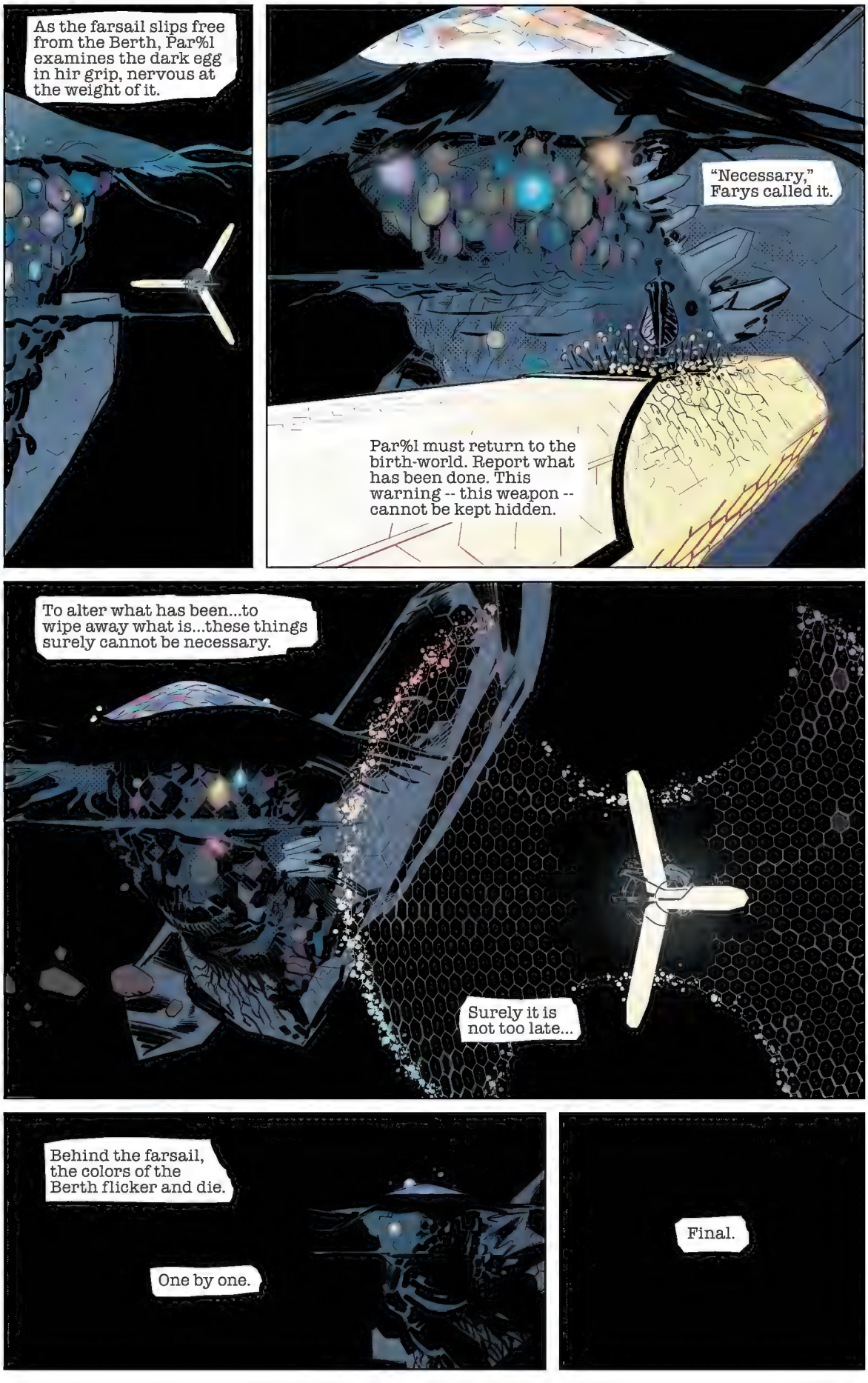
FOR WHAT, I DO NOT KNOW.
COME.
I...HAVE MADE SOMETHING FOR YOU.
The tiding-eggs pulse erratically in their creche.
As the energies of the Berth flicker and fail, growing the larvae inside to maturity has become all but impossible.
That even one remains viable is a tribute to Farys' skill.
Par%l directs the thought outward. An attempt to breach the gulf between them.
A failure.
"VIABLE" IS NO LONGER ADEQUATE.
WHAT USE ARE TIDINGS IN THE BROKEN AGE? WE KNOW THE TIDINGS ALREADY.
THIS...IS A WARNING.
FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT.
The ovum seems to shudder as Farys gently tears it free.

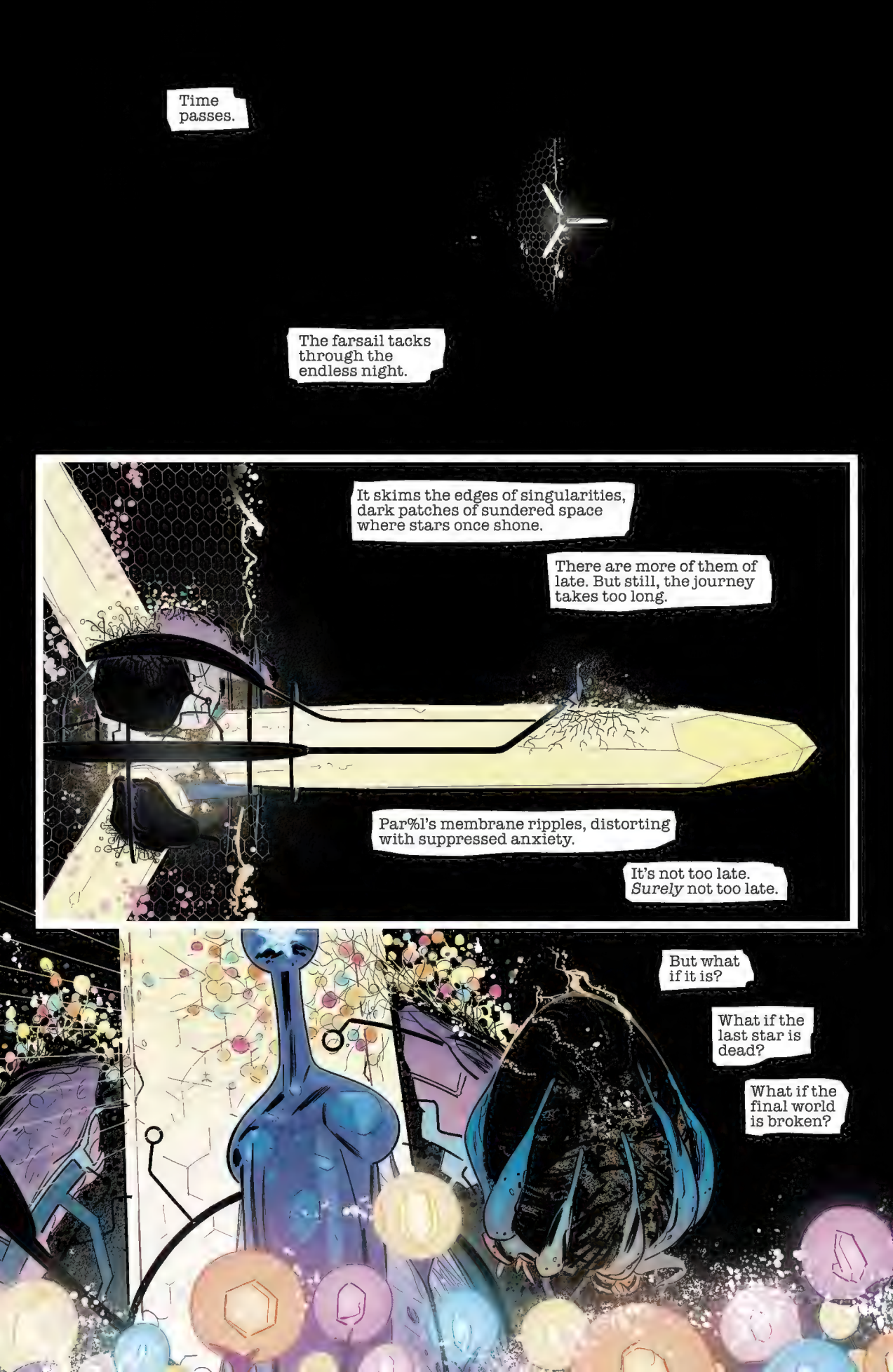
The black chitin that coats the shell as it hardens is too lustrous. Too potent.
Par%l feels hir membrane contract, as if in premonition.
Tiding-flies are bred for communication across distance. Across light-centuries, if need be.

Thus, they move not only across space, but against time. They make their endless journeys to arrive at the exact point in time they left behind.
But never *before* that point.
The egg feels grotesque. Heavy with corruption. Obscene in power.
Par%l flashes cold blue as understanding comes.

In hir loneliness, cut off from all contact, from all hope, Farys has not been breeding tiding-flies...
...but engineering them.
YOU
...YOU HAVE MADE AN ABOMINATION.

The thought is cold and barbed, scratching the skin of their shared space.
But it cannot be dismissed.
—I HAVE DONE WHAT IS NECESSARY.
—TO—TO SEND WORD BEFORE IT IS THOUGHT—
TO PLACE KNOWLEDGE IN A TIME BEFORE IT IS KNOWN—THIS COULD WIPE TIME AWAY!
IT COULD BREAK WHAT IS!
WHAT IS HAS ALREADY BEEN BROKEN. AND WE MUST LEAVE THE WARNING.
RECORD AS MUCH AS YOU CAN. SEND IT AS FAR AS YOU CAN.
FARYS— YOU CANNOT ASK THIS OF ME—
I DO NOT ASK.
With that thought, Farys severs the connection.
The break is violent.
The ending is final.


As the farsail slips free from the Berth, Par%l examines the dark egg in hir grip, nervous at the weight of it.
"Necessary," Farys called it.
Par%l must return to the birth-world. Report what has been done. This warning -- this weapon -- cannot be kept hidden.
To alter what has been...to wipe away what is...these things surely cannot be necessary.
Surely it is not too late...
Behind the farsail, the colors of the Berth flicker and die.
One by one.
Final.


Time passes.
The farsail tacks through the endless night.
It skims the edges of singularities, dark patches of sundered space where stars once shone.
There are more of them of late. But still, the journey takes too long.
Par%l's membrane ripples, distorting with suppressed anxiety.
It's not too late. *Surely* not too late.
But what if it is?
What if the last star is dead?
What if the final world is broken?

What if the farsail emerges from the last jump into darkness and silence?

What if there is truly no color left?

What if Par%l dies? Slowly, as Farys died?

Alone in the dark?

What if?

And then the journey ends.

And the approach to O%los begins.

The beauty of O%los is without end and without limit.

The chromatic seas boil and writhe, heavy with meaning and memory and life, flowing like song around the sterile places of knowing.

Above, the crystal superstructures of the moons dance in their intricate lockstep, shimmering with the reflected hues.

And far beyond, the great homestar shines.

Par%l feels hir crystals pulse and resonate in harmony with the ebbs and flows of the birth-world, the first-and-final world... and yet...

...and yet, the weapon Farys made is dark, and heavy...and the thought will not escape hir mind...

*What if it's too late?*

So Par%l turns.

There is a single light out in the black. A light no child of O%los would ever make.

The forbidden color shines in the empty sky.

When Par%l remembers death...

...the memory is *green*.

It was always too late.

And the Breaker of Worlds is here at last.

Par%l has never seen the Breaker-Apart. No being has, and lived.

It flexes a distended cavern of thick, opaque skin, ringed by mountains of osseous tissue.

Set into that hideous continent -- twin pools of green, burning like inverted suns. Portals to some unknown horror, waiting after death.

The death it brings.

Two vast structures of viridian flesh bulge obscenely as they rotate at hideous angles from the central mass.

The creature is unlike anything that lives in this cosmos. And yet, Par%l knows it well.

This is what all have feared since time began. The grotesque legend that murdered color and light.

Where the green shadow falls, life ends, in terror and pain...

...and now that shadow falls across O%los.

The soft ethereal tones of the glittering moons warp and distort, shrieking as they shatter.

The domes of knowledge burst and fail. Millennia of science, of striving, of song and sorrow -- all wiped from being.

Nine billion living souls are extinguished. Membranes rupture, nuclei shatter like spun glass. Biology becomes physics.

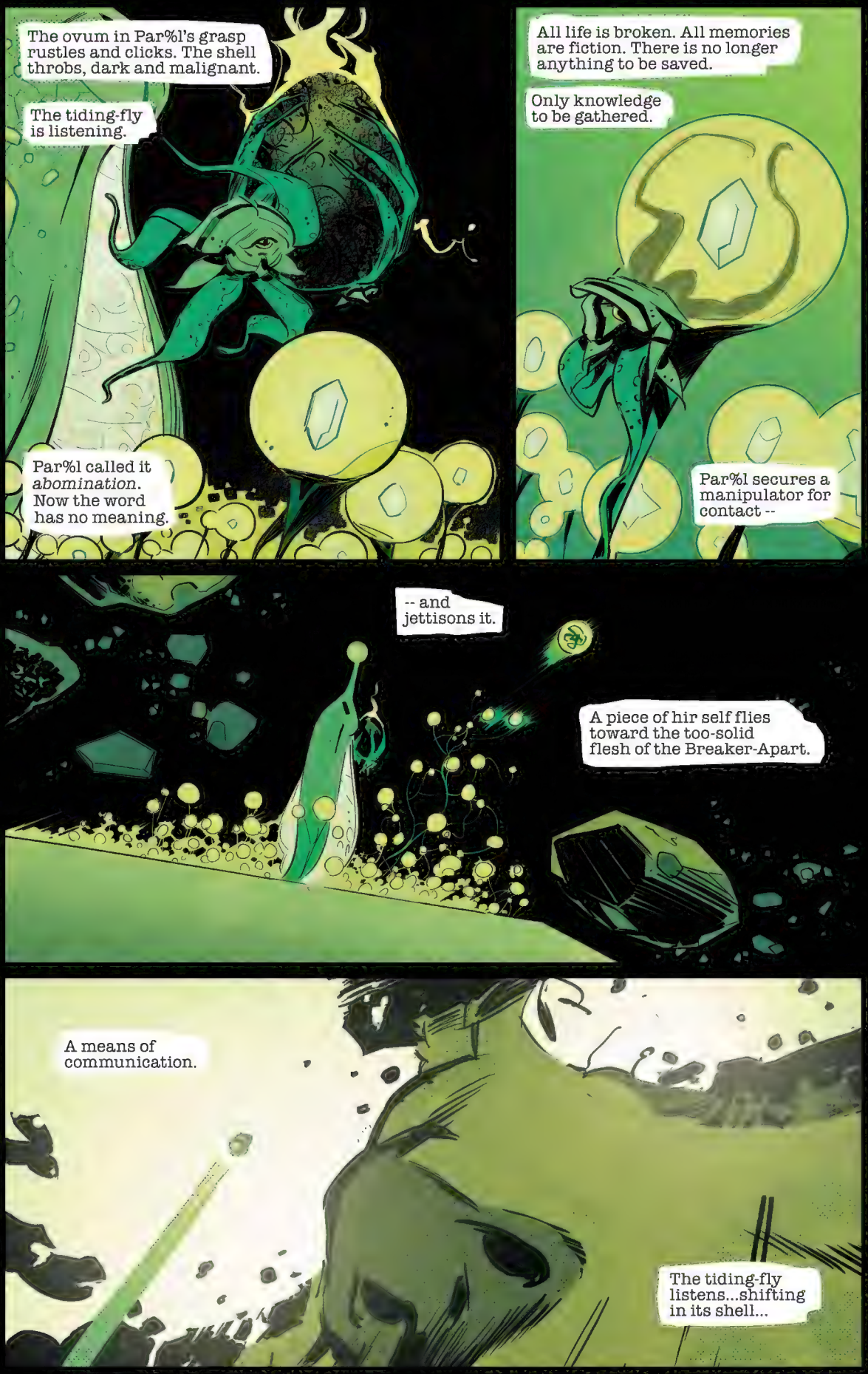
A world's color burns out and fades, consumed. Gone.

There is no sound.

Par%l thinks of a pattern of blue and gold on a decorative walkway, glimpsed once, never forgotten.
Of the harmonies hir birth-triad sang at hir crib.
Of the tang of the Southern Sea, and the glowing bellies of the skimmers that swam and mated across the surface.
Of a world of beauty without end and without limit.
But such memories are no longer true. They cannot be, in the way hir people understand truth.
All evidence for them is gone -- so the memories are broken.
O%los is broken.
Life is broken.
All is broken.

And the Breaker of Worlds has noticed hir grief.
Twin tracts of green flame cast their flickering light across the farsail. Par%l freezes.
The color of death sweeps across the cabin.
The vast constellation of meat and bone shifts, rippling and twitching.
Par%l does not understand what the Breaker-Apart is doing. There is no frame of reference.
Par%l has never seen a *face* before.

Par%l has never seen a *smile*.


The ovum in Par%l's grasp rustles and clicks. The shell throbs, dark and malignant.
The tiding-fly is listening.
Par%l called it *abomination*. Now the word has no meaning.
All life is broken. All memories are fiction. There is no longer anything to be saved.
Only knowledge to be gathered.
Par%l secures a manipulator for contact --
-- and jettisons it.
A piece of hir self flies toward the too-solid flesh of the Breaker-Apart.
A means of communication.
The tiding-fly listens...shifting in its shell...

...as contact is made.

Par%l expects a monstrous, alien presence. A burning fire of green rage...

But there is nothing. The Breaker-Apart is hollow. Any soul it had is gone.

Instead, a vast abyss seems to open beneath hir mind. Beneath everything.

Below all.

Par%l is a waterdrop tumbling into an endless well.

But still. The question must be asked.

WHY?

I AM THE ONE BELOW ALL

WITH THESE HANDS I BREAK

WITH THIS MOUTH I HOWL

I DEVOURED THE SELVES THAT WERE HERE IN A TIME LONG PAST

NOW THERE IS I

AND ONLY I

I AM ALL-POWERFUL

AND MY WEAPON IS HATE

I HAVE MADE OF THIS A THING OF HATE

A HOLLOW SHELL

A HULK

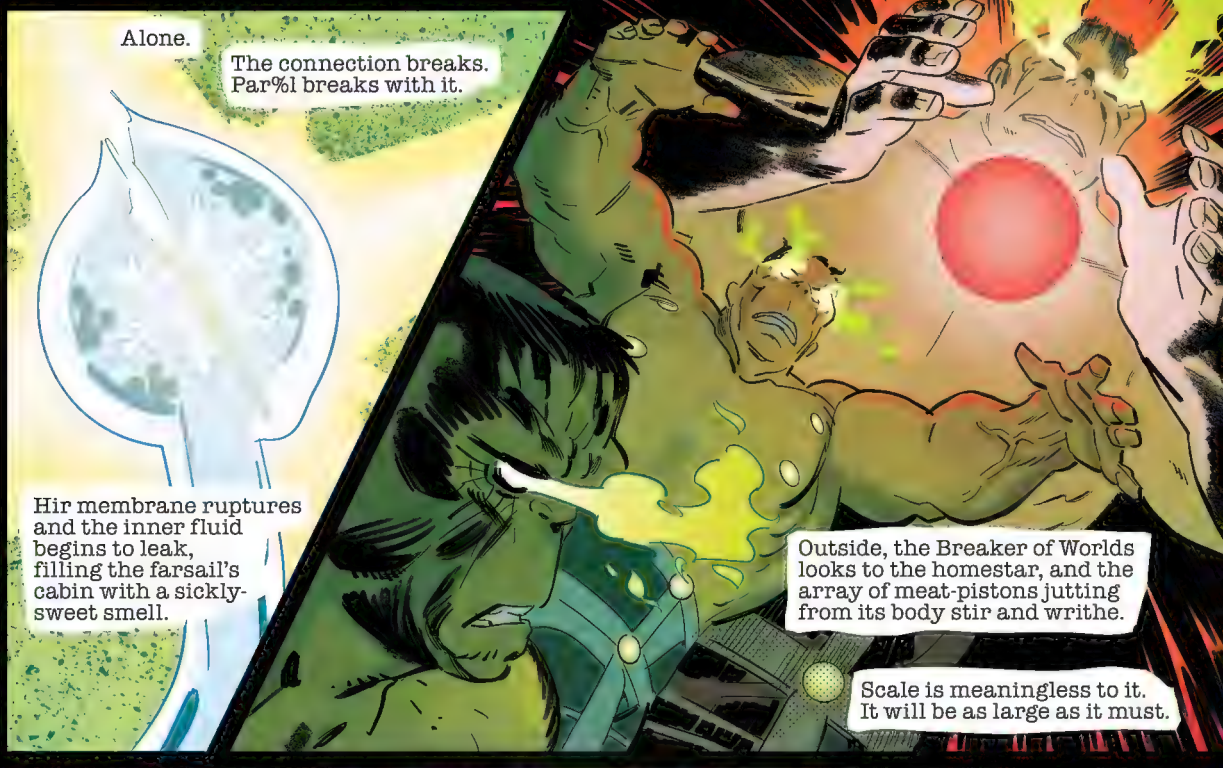
THE MYSTERY FRIGHTENS AND DISGUSTS ME

I WILL KILL IT

MAKE ALL HOLLOW AS I

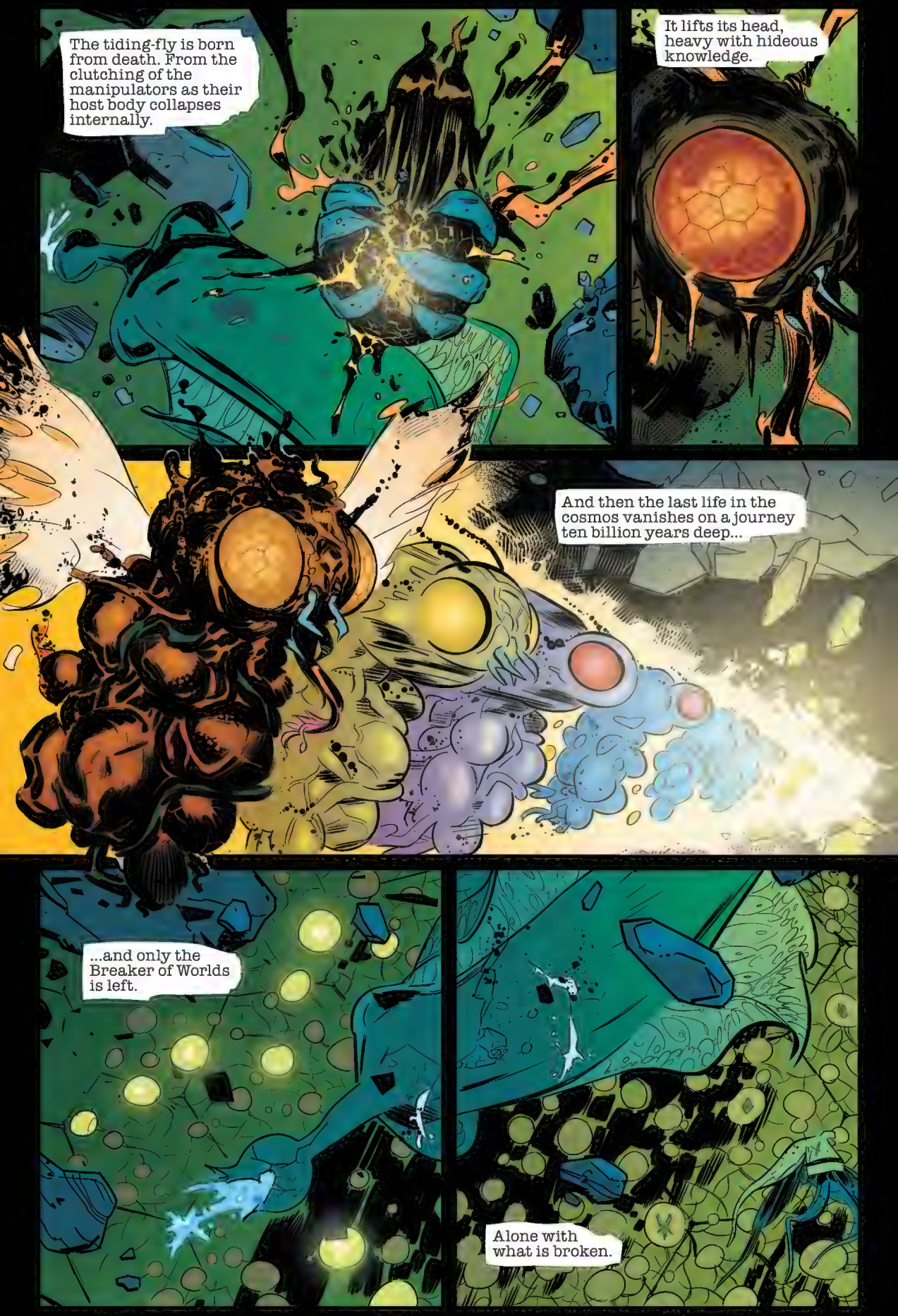
DEAD AND DARK AS I

AND I WILL BE ALONE


Alone.
The connection breaks. Par%l breaks with it.
Hir membrane ruptures and the inner fluid begins to leak, filling the farsail's cabin with a sickly-sweet smell.
Outside, the Breaker of Worlds looks to the homestar, and the array of meat-pistons jutting from its body stir and writhe.
Scale is meaningless to it. It will be as large as it must.

In what is left of hir disintegrating intelligence, Par%l understands what it is doing.
The Breaker-Apart is taking the star in its...hands.
They are called hands.

It is hir last thought. Hir remaining manipulators flex and spasm, as if in sympathy...
...and the shell cracks.


The tiding-fly is born from death. From the clutching of the manipulators as their host body collapses internally.
It lifts its head, heavy with hideous knowledge.
And then the last life in the cosmos vanishes on a journey ten billion years deep...
...and only the Breaker of Worlds is left.
Alone with what is broken.

The last star flashes green as it begins to die.

In the far past, the knowledge is delivered to eyes that understand it.

Yet there is no wave of change. No reordering of events, no wiping away of what is.

What is remains broken. Color is broken. Light is broken.

All is broken.

In the dead, deep dark, an immortal hulk tears the last star from the sky...

...and is alone.

"JOE?

IS THAT YOU? ARE YOU THERE?
I NEED HELP, JOE. I CAN'T SEE.

SOMETHING'S EATING ME.

I THINK...

I THINK IT KILLED THE HULK."

– BRUCE BANNER

AND I'LL BE BACK.
WHEN THE MORN IS NEW.
AND I'LL HAVE MORE
IDEAS
FOR YOU.
AND YOU'LL HAVE THINGS YOU'D LIKE TO DO...

AND I WILL TOO.

26

"That stony law I stamp to dust;
and scatter religion abroad
to the four winds as a torn book,
& none shall gather the leaves..."

– WILLIAM BLAKE
*AMERICA: A PROPHECY*

MY NAME IS ROBERT BRUCE BANNER.
YOU KNOW ME BETTER AS THE HULK.
I AM BROADCASTING FROM A SECRET LOCATION UNDER THE AEGIS OF SHADOW BASE--AN ORGANIZATION THAT WAS, UNTIL RECENTLY, TASKED TO VIVISECT ME AND CREATE WEAPONS FROM MY BODY.
FOR THIS PURPOSE, THEY WERE ALLOCATED A "BLACK BUDGET"--A COVERT, DENIABLE REVENUE STREAM FUNNELED FROM OUR NATION'S MILITARY--OF 1.2 BILLION DOLLARS.
THAT MONEY COULD HAVE BEEN SPENT ON EDUCATION OR MEDICINE. OR HELPING BUILD THE RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE WE'LL NEED TO SURVIVE THE COMING CENTURY.
MORE LIKELY, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SPENT ON MORE GUNS. OR MORE BOMBS. OR MORE CAMPS.
BUT...WELL, THAT'S THE WORLD WE LIVE IN, ISN'T IT?
THE HUMAN WORLD.

"LET'S TALK ABOUT THE HUMAN WORLD."
MASSACHUSETTS.
BOOTH SERVICE
YOU KNOW...
...THIS MIGHT BE THE BEST CLAM CHOWDER I'VE EVER HAD.
COMPLIMENTS TO THE CHEF.
MY PLEASURE, DR. BANNER.
IT WAS MY FATHER'S RECIPE.
NATURALLY, THE CLAMS WERE HAND-CAUGHT.
NATURALLY.
HEY-- SORRY I'M LATE.
I HAD TO LOSE THE PAPARAZZI. FIGURED THIS WAS SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T WANT THE WHOLE COUNTRY TO SEE.
AND ON THAT NOTE... I GOTTA ASK:
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING, BRUCE?
CLOSED

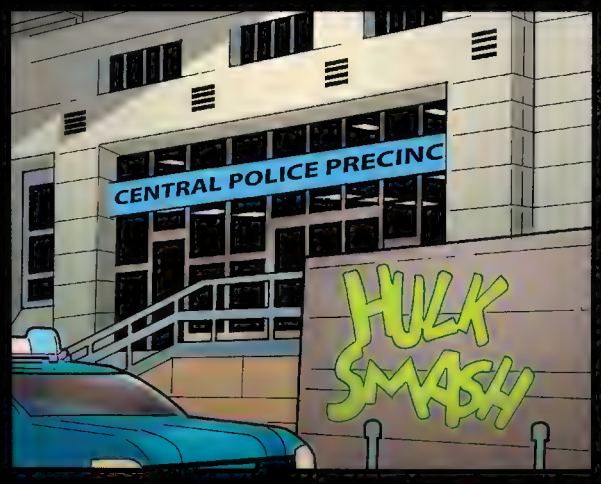
AMADEUS CHO. THE MAN OF THE HOUR.
HOW HAVE YOU BEEN? I DON'T THINK WE'VE ACTUALLY TALKED SINCE...
...SINCE I WAS THE HULK.
SINCE I TOOK THAT OFF YOUR SHOULDERS...
TEMPORARILY. BUT IT WAS A KIND THOUGHT, NONETHELESS.
AND IT HELPED FORCE A...CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE.
YEAH. I WATCHED YOUR LITTLE PIRATE BROADCAST.
YOUR MANIFESTO.
TELL ME, BRUCE--DO YOU STILL PLAY MINECRAFT ON PEACEFUL?
...
I DON'T THINK WE HAVE MUCH TIME ANYMORE FOR PLAYING GAMES.
THE ROYAL "WE"?
YOU KNOW, I HAD MY OWN BRUSH WITH HULK SYNDROME. I HAD A VOICE IN MY HEAD THAT THOUGHT IT KNEW BETTER.
SO... AGAIN. FOR REAL.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?

--IN A VIDEO MANIFESTO RELEASED ONTO THE WORLD WIDE WEB, THE GAMMA MUTATE BRUCE BANNER OFFICIALLY DECLARED WAR AGAINST THE HUMAN SPECIES--
ROXX NEWS

WHO? TELL ME--WHO DID HE ACTUALLY DECLARE WAR ON?
OH, FOR-- HE WANTS TO END THE HUMAN WORLD! HE SAID IT HIMSELF!
WHAT ELSE CAN THAT MEAN?

--REPORTS OF A RED, WINGED CREATURE TEARING OPEN THE WIRE FENCING WITH CLAWED FEET, THEN PROTECTING THE DETAINEES AS THEY ESCAPED.
A HIGH CONCENTRATION OF GAMMA RADIATION WAS FOUND IN THE AREA, SUGGESTING A CONNECTION WITH--
ROXX NEWS

...
WE'RE LOOKING INTO IT.
ROXX NEWS


CENTRAL POLICE PRECINC
HULK SMASH

TONIGHT ON ROXXLINE--IS YOUR CHILD REBELLIOUS? AFRAID OF YOU? UNUSUALLY QUIET OR THOUGHTFUL?
ROXXLINE
DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE HULK SYNDROME--AND IS THERE A CURE?

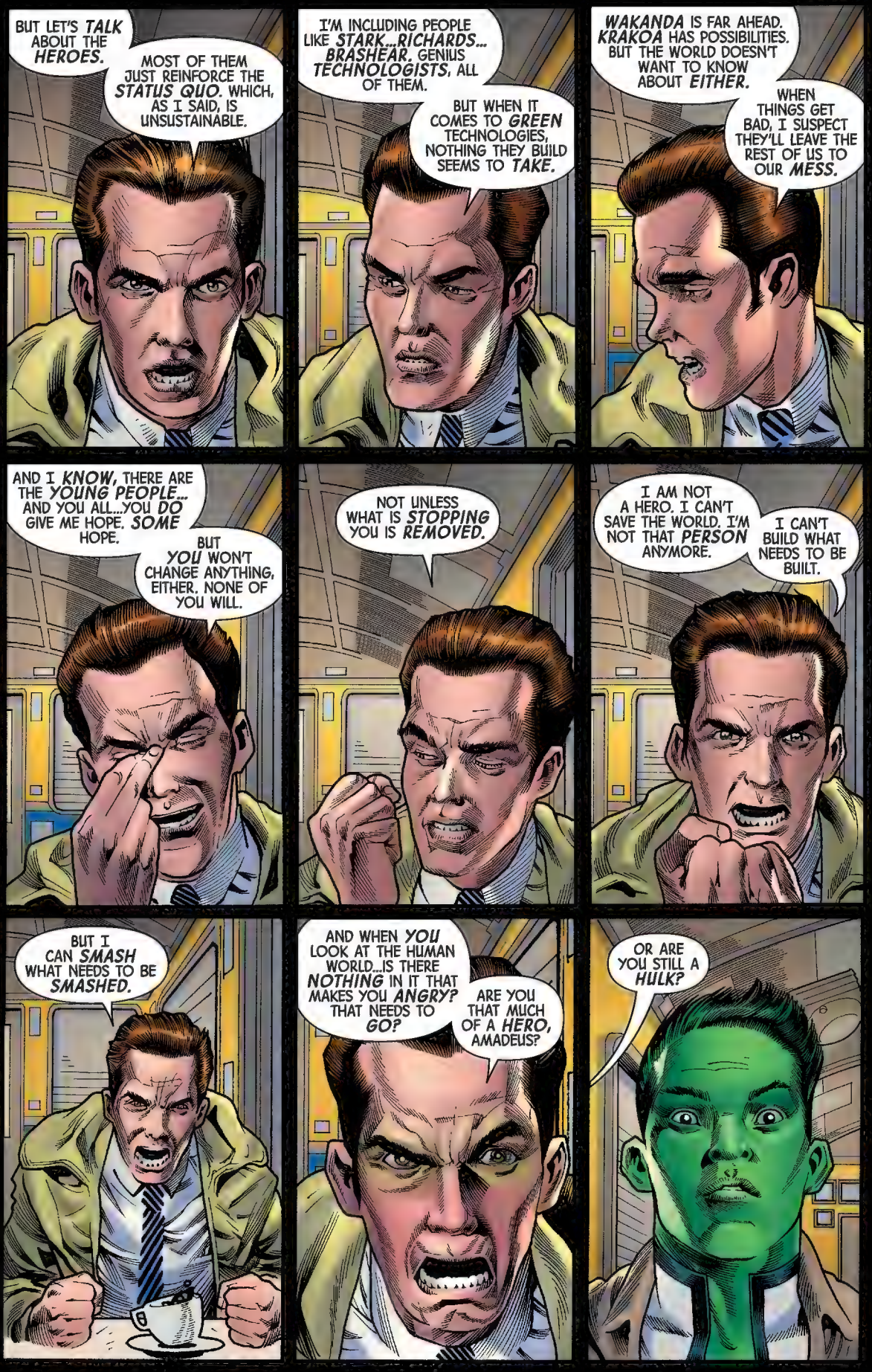
SHADOW BASE SITE G.
A HIDDEN LOCATION.
"HULK SYNDROME"?
I THINK THAT WAS SOMETHING AMADEUS CHO CAME UP WITH, DR. McGOWAN.
ESSENTIALLY-- GAMMA MUTATION HAS BEEN KNOWN TO CAUSE SYMPTOMS SIMILAR TO DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER.
IT HAPPENED TO HIM. AND TO ME. JEN WALTERS SEEMS TO HAVE IT NOW.
AMADEUS SUSPECTED IT'S BECAUSE WE ALL TOOK OUR GAMMA FROM BRUCE--
--WHO ALREADY HAD D.I.D. WHEN HE BECAME THE HULK.
SO...GAMMA TRANSFER REFLECTS THE MENTAL CONDITION OF THE GAMMA DONOR?
AMADEUS THOUGHT SO.
HIS THEORIES ARE USUALLY OPTIMISTIC IN THAT WAY.
OPTIMISTIC?
WELL, THE OTHER OPTION IS THAT BRUCE ALSO HAS "HULK SYNDROME"--ON TOP OF HIS PRE-EXISTING D.I.D. CONDITION.
WHICH IS LESS OPTIMISTIC, SINCE HE CAN LEVEL A CITY ON A WHIM...
NOT TO MENTION SOMEONE JUST GAVE HIM A BILLION DOLLARS.
IT'S STILL SHADOW BASE'S BILLION DOLLARS, DR. SAMSON.
ACTUALLY, MORE LIKE 300 MILLION NOW. WE SPENT A LOT.

A LOT OF THE REST IS EARMARKED--MAINTENANCE COSTS, SALARIES FOR THOSE WHO DIDN'T DEFECT TO OTHER BLACK-BUDGET GROUPS LIKE ORCHIS OR TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR.
WE LOST OUR MERCENARY FORCE THAT WAY, UNFORTUNATELY--THE ONES WHO SURVIVED. PLUS HALF THE MONITORS...MOST OF ADMIN...
YOU'RE NOT WORRIED ABOUT WHAT THEY KNOW?
THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS PLACE. SITE G WAS A PURE SCIENCE FACILITY--AND SCIENCE TEAM STAYED LOYAL.
ANYONE WITH CLEARANCE TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLACE IS WITH US.
SO YOU ALL JUST WENT FROM FIGHTING BRUCE TO...FOLLOWING HIM? JUST LIKE THAT?
WELL, REMEMBER FORTEAN WAS THE ONLY THING KEEPING US OUT OF JAIL. AND HE'S GONE.
BUT ALSO...OUR JOB WAS TO STUDY BRUCE BANNER.
NOW HE LIVES HERE. AND WITH WHAT WE'RE LEARNING FROM HIM...WE CAN DO SO MUCH GOOD.
DEL HERE--WE COULD GIVE HIM HIS LIFE BACK. GIVE RICK JONES HIS FACE BACK...
HOW MUCH OF THIS IS GUILT TALKING, DOCTOR?
...
HE'S RIGHT, LEONARD.
WHAT HE'S SAYING...THOSE BROADCASTS HE'S MAKING...I HONESTLY THINK HE'S RIGHT.
I BELIEVE IN BRUCE BANNER.
DO YOU?

WE BELIEVE IN BRUCE BANNER
ONE WAY
--FOOTAGE OF THE GAMMA MUTATE RICK JONES HOVERING OVER A PERFORMANCE BY A LOCAL PUNK BAND WHOSE NAME WE CANNOT REPEAT ON AIR--
HIS PRESENCE CLEARLY ENERGIZING THE CROWD--
ROXX NEWS
SENATOR GEOFFREY PATRICK DESCRIBED BANNER'S RHETORIC AS "POTENTIALLY RUINOUS TO IMPRESSIONABLE MINDS."
"BANNER MAY BE MORE DANGEROUS TO SOCIETY THAN THE HULK," HE CONTINUED--
ROXX NEWS
--WEARING A GREEN OUTFIT, ONE OF MANY SEEN AT THE DISTURBANCE.
IN THE FOOTAGE, THE RIOTER CAN CLEARLY BE HEARD TO YELL "HULK SMASH" BEFORE HURLING A CAN OF TEAR GAS BACK AT--
ROXX NEWS
THEY'RE ALL CRIMINALS. EVERY ONE OF 'EM.
FROM THE LEADERS ON DOWN.
CHICAGO POLICE
HULK SMASH
POLICE
ROXX NEWS
--HEAD OF SHADOW BASE HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED BY WHISTLEBLOWERS AS CHARLENE McGOWAN.
McGOWAN, A CONVICTED DRUG DEALER AND MANUFACTURER, REMAINS WANTED BY THE AUTHORITIES FOR HER PART IN--
5'0"
4'4"
ROXX NEWS

THE NEW SHADOW BASE COMMANDER. SHE'S THE KEY. SHE ALWAYS WAS.
RICK TOLD ME HOW SHE PUT HER LIFE ON THE LINE FOR HER TEAM. THOSE WHO STAYED WITH THE BASE--WITH HER--SHE HAS THEIR ABSOLUTE LOYALTY.
AND SHE'S CHOSEN TO WORK WITH ME.
SO I HAVE THEIR ABSOLUTE LOYALTY.
...WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OLD SHADOW BASE COMMANDER?
OKAY. I HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION. I'M A GAMMA GUY, BRUCE.
IF I DIE... DO I STAY DEAD?
PERSONALLY, I WOULDN'T RISK IT. I DON'T THINK THERE ARE HARD AND FAST RULES.
GENERAL ROSS IS STILL DEAD...SO IS WALTER...
YEAH, BUT I READ THAT HE CAME BACK THE FIRST TIME.
WHICH REMINDS ME--YOU KNOW YOUR REPORTER FRIEND WANTED TO INTERVIEW ME ABOUT YOU?
SHE'S MORE THE HULK'S FRIEND...
YEAH? WHICH HULK IS THAT, BRUCE?
DO I KNOW HIM?

BECAUSE I DON'T THINK THE HULK I KNEW IS AROUND THESE DAYS...
THE "GREEN SCAR."
HE AND THE PROFESSOR ARE DORMANT RIGHT NOW. I'M NOT SURE WHY.
UH-HUH. THE TWO MOST HEROIC HULKS AREN'T UP FOR THIS. BUT YOU'RE NOT SURE WHY.
C'MON, DUDE.
LOOK, I KNOW ABOUT ANGER. YOU KNOW I'VE STRUGGLED WITH THAT.
I--I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO WANT TO SAVE THE WORLD--
I DON'T.
THE WORLD CAN'T BE SAVED, AMADEUS.
NOT THE HUMAN WORLD.
NOT THE WORLD AS WE CURRENTLY UNDERSTAND IT.
EARTH'S CLIMATE IS CHANGING RAPIDLY. THE WORLD HUMANS BUILT IS...NOT SUSTAINABLE.
BUT THERE'S STILL SHORT-TERM PROFIT TO BE MADE, SO THE SAME SYSTEMS ARE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE.
OVER ALL OUR DEAD BODIES, IF NEED BE.
BRUCE--LOOK, THE MATH OF THIS IS BAD. I'M NOT SAYING IT'S NOT.
BUT THERE'S STILL HOPE.
WE STILL LIVE IN A WORLD OF HEROES...
...
I DON'T BELIEVE THAT ANYMORE.


BUT LET'S TALK ABOUT THE HEROES.
MOST OF THEM JUST REINFORCE THE STATUS QUO. WHICH, AS I SAID, IS UNSUSTAINABLE.
I'M INCLUDING PEOPLE LIKE STARK...RICHARDS... BRASHEAR. GENIUS TECHNOLOGISTS, ALL OF THEM.
BUT WHEN IT COMES TO GREEN TECHNOLOGIES, NOTHING THEY BUILD SEEMS TO TAKE.
WAKANDA IS FAR AHEAD. KRAKOA HAS POSSIBILITIES. BUT THE WORLD DOESN'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT EITHER.
WHEN THINGS GET BAD, I SUSPECT THEY'LL LEAVE THE REST OF US TO OUR MESS.
AND I KNOW, THERE ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE... AND YOU ALL...YOU DO GIVE ME HOPE. SOME HOPE.
BUT YOU WON'T CHANGE ANYTHING, EITHER. NONE OF YOU WILL.
NOT UNLESS WHAT IS STOPPING YOU IS REMOVED.
I AM NOT A HERO. I CAN'T SAVE THE WORLD. I'M NOT THAT PERSON ANYMORE.
I CAN'T BUILD WHAT NEEDS TO BE BUILT.
BUT I CAN SMASH WHAT NEEDS TO BE SMASHED.
AND WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE HUMAN WORLD...IS THERE NOTHING IN IT THAT MAKES YOU ANGRY? THAT NEEDS TO GO?
ARE YOU THAT MUCH OF A HERO, AMADEUS?
OR ARE YOU STILL A HULK?

BECAUSE WE DO NOT NEED ANOTHER HULK!
AND YET THAT IS WHAT THEY WANTED TO DO! THE CREEPS IN THE DEEP STATE!
MAKE MORE OF HIM! USING YOUR MONEY TO DO IT!
ONE BILLION DOLLARS OF TAXPAYER MONEY--HANDED TO CRIMINALS AND JUNKIES!
--SECRETARY OF SUPER HUMAN AFFAIRS, SENATOR KEVIN KRASK, PUBLICALLY DENIED REPORTS OF SO-CALLED "HULK FUNDING" GOING TO-- I'M SORRY, EXCUSE ME--
--I'M GETTING WORD THE SENATOR HAS JUST RESIGNED--
ROXX NEWS
DEBT
"I THOUGHT THAT GUY WAS DEAD!"
LOOK, I'M NO HULK-LOVER! BUT THE GOVERNMENT CLEARLY CANNOT BE TRUSTED TO FIGHT HIM! THE PUBLIC SECTOR HAS TO STEP IN HERE!
AND NOW, A WORD FROM OUR SPONSORS.
THIS IS MIKE "THE MIC" JACOBS ON SHOCK ROXX RADIO ASKING--BEGGING!--FOR SOMEONE WHO ACTUALLY WORKS FOR A LIVING TO TACKLE THE HULK!

ARIZONA.
ALL RIGHT, JACKIE. FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS--WELCOME TO THE NEW OFFICES.
THEY COME WITH OUR NEW DISTRIBUTORS, OUR NEW STAFF, OUR NEW PRESSES AND ALL OUR NEW MONEY.
THEY ALSO COME WITH A REMINDER: IF WE WANT TO KEEP THESE NICE NEW THINGS, WE'VE GOT TO PRODUCE. EVERY SINGLE DAY.
SO--OUR SECOND ORDER OF BUSINESS. OUR ONGOING MEAL TICKET AS A NATIONAL NEWSPAPER.
YOU KNOW THE DRILL. THE DAILY BUGLE HAS SPIDER-MAN--THE ARIZONA HERALD HAS THE HULK.
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?
WELL...SINCE WE BROKE THE SHADOW BASE STORY, THERE HAVE OBVIOUSLY BEEN SOME PRETTY SEISMIC DEVELOPMENTS...
RIGHT. BANNER CORROBORATING THAT DID US NO HARM AT ALL--
SORRY, COULD I BREAK IN HERE?
GABE FLORES. I'M THE NEW HEAD OF LEGAL.
MS. McGEE--TO GET THE SHADOW BASE STORY IN THE DETAIL YOU DID, YOU WERE EMBEDDED WITH THE HULKS FOR...SOME WEEKS.
HOW CLOSE TO THEM WOULD YOU SAY YOU WERE?

...I WASN'T JUST AN EYEWITNESS FOR THE SHADOW BASE RAID.
I HELPED PLAN IT.
TALKING TO McGOWAN, PERSUADING HER TO TURN ON FORTEAN--THAT WAS MY IDEA.
I DIDN'T KNOW IT'D WORK OUT LIKE... IT HAS...BUT FORTEAN WAS GOING TO HAVE ME KILLED.
I'M NOT SORRY.
OOF. WELL, THANK YOU FOR YOUR HONESTY.
BUT LET'S NEVER MENTION ANY OF THAT OUTSIDE THIS ROOM, PLEASE. IT COULD BE CONSTRUED AS...WELL...
...CONSPIRACY WITH A KNOWN TERRORIST.
NOT TO MENTION THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATION THAT WE MANUFACTURED THE NEWS ON THIS ONE.
"YOU PROVIDE THE PICTURES, WE'LL PROVIDE THE HULK."
WE'RE ALREADY BEING ACCUSED OF MONETIZING BANNER...
WELL...THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT AFTER TODAY, WE WON'T BE THE ONLY ONES.
THAT'S TOMORROW'S FRONT PAGE. MY SOURCES SAY THE GOVERNMENT IS READY TO ANNOUNCE THEY'RE SUBCONTRACTING ANTI-HULK OPERATIONS.
ROXX NEWS .COM
Brought to you by ROXXON
HULK PROMISES NEW WAVE OF TERROR
GUESS WHO THE WINNING BIDDER WAS?

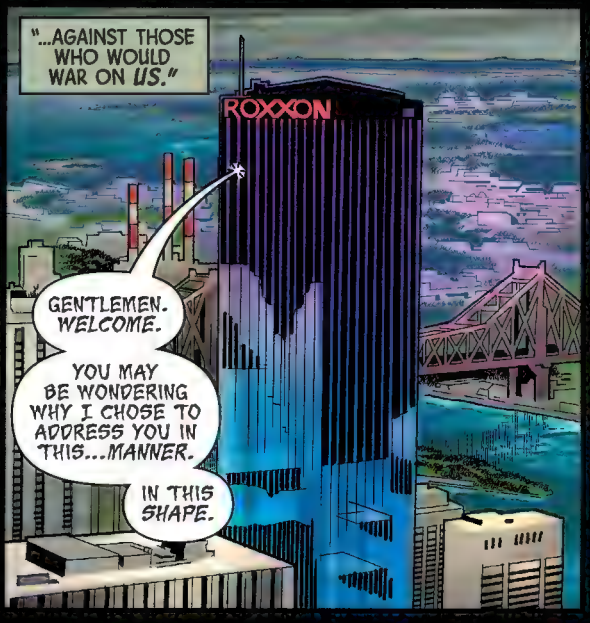
YOU'VE ALMOST CERTAINLY HEARD THE PHRASE "DISASTER CAPITALISM."
CATASTROPHES CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RUTHLESS PEOPLE TO PROFIT FROM THEM--ECONOMICALLY OR POLITICALLY.
AND WHEN THE MAIN MEANS OF PROFIT IS ITSELF CREATING THE CATASTROPHE--RUNAWAY CLIMATE CHANGE, WITH ALL THE RESULTANT POLITICAL INSTABILITY IT BRINGS--
--WE'RE LEFT WITH A FEEDBACK LOOP. DISASTER BY DESIGN.
THE HUMAN WORLD IS A WORLD THAT DESTROYS ITSELF--AND ALL WHO TRY TO LIVE IN IT--TO MAKE MONEY FOR A TINY PERCENTAGE OF THOSE IN CHARGE.
THAT IS THE WORLD THAT NEEDS TO END. AND I CAN'T END IT ALONE.
BUT THEN AGAIN...I'M NEVER ALONE.
AM I?

WHAT'S THE PLAN HERE, BRUCE?
IS IT JUST TO BREAK EVERYTHING AND HOPE THINGS GET BETTER? BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE WE'VE SEEN THAT ONE LATELY.
...
NO. NO, YOU'RE RIGHT.
THE HULK IS A BIG BLUNT INSTRUMENT--IF IT'S GOING TO BE USED, IT NEEDS TO BE CAREFULLY TARGETED.
BUT I THINK IT SHOULD BE.
I MENTIONED THE UNSUSTAINABILITY OF CURRENT HUMAN SYSTEMS. ONE OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH THOSE SYSTEMS, AS I SEE IT, IS A LACK OF CONSEQUENCES.
HUMAN CRUELTY, HUMAN SHORTSIGHTEDNESS AND YES, HUMAN ANGER... THESE THINGS ARE CURRENTLY BEING EXACERBATED-- MANIPULATED-- FOR PROFIT.
THE PROFIT OF A FEW... ENTITIES.
THOSE ENTITIES, WE ARE TOLD, ARE "TOO BIG TO FAIL." BUT VERY OCCASIONALLY, SOME JUSTICE IS DONE. A FINE IS LEVIED.
MEN WITH PERSONAL FORTUNES IN THE BILLIONS ARE ASKED TO PAY... POCKET CHANGE.
THEN THEY BUY WHOEVER THEY HAVE TO TO STOP IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN.
BUT WHAT IF YOU WERE TO TARGET ONE OF THESE...ENTITIES... AND MAKE THEM PAY? ACTUALLY PAY?
WHAT IF YOU NEVER STOPPED?

...
TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, BRUCE...NO. I'M NOT A HULK.
NOT ANYMORE.
I FEEL WHAT YOU'RE FEELING. I TOLD YOU, I KNOW THAT ANGER--I'VE LET IT TAKE ME OVER.
AND IT WASN'T ENOUGH.
I'M ONE OF THE SMARTEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, AND I COULDN'T SOLVE THE PROBLEMS IT BROUGHT.
LOOK, YOU'RE MY FRIEND. I STILL... I TRUST YOU, MAN.
BUT IF YOU'RE REALLY PLANNING THIS KIND OF MOVE...YOU NEED TO PLAN CAREFULLY.
I LOVE YOU, BRUCE, BUT YOU'RE AN ANGRY MIDDLE-CLASS WHITE GUY TALKING ABOUT REVOLUTION.
THAT DOESN'T ALWAYS END SO WELL.
I'LL BE WATCHING YOU, DUDE.
...
THAT COULD HAVE GONE BETTER.
I...DIDN'T LOSE MY TEMPER WITH HIM, DID I?
OH, I WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT IT, DOCTOR.
I LOSE MY TEMPER ALL THE TIME...

...AND I SEEM TO MUDDLE THROUGH.
THANK YOU, NAMOR. AND IT WAS A GOOD IDEA NOT TO MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN.
I DON'T THINK AMADEUS WOULD HAVE REACTED WELL IF HE THOUGHT WE WERE A TEAM...
WE'VE NEVER QUITE BEEN A TEAM, DOCTOR.
BUT WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN AN EXCELLENT NON-TEAM.
HMH. THIS DOES REMIND ME OF THE OLD DAYS.
"I DON'T GO FOR ALL THAT FLOWERY TALK, BUT I HATE HUMANS TOO..."
SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE HULK.
NOW...LET ME GIVE YOU MY ADVICE.

HERE'S WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT.
IF THERE ARE NO MEANINGFUL CONSEQUENCES FOR THOSE WHO WOULD USE THEIR POWER TO ENGINEER AND PROFIT FROM DISASTER...
...THEN WE WILL CREATE SOME.
IN ONE WEEK, YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR ABOUT A HULK RAMPAGE.
A TARGETED HULK RAMPAGE. AGAINST A PARTICULAR ENTITY.
A DECLARATION OF WAR...


"...AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD WAR ON US."
ROXXON
GENTLEMEN. WELCOME.
YOU MAY BE WONDERING WHY I CHOSE TO ADDRESS YOU IN THIS...MANNER.
IN THIS SHAPE.

WHY I AM NOW SO OPEN, WHEN ONCE I PRACTICED DISCRETION.
PUT SIMPLY... I HAVE LEARNED PROPER PERSPECTIVE.

IN THE RECENT WAR BETWEEN HUMANITY AND THE ELVES... WE BACKED THE ELVES.
TREASON, IN ANY SENSE OF THE WORD. HIGH CRIMES COMMITTED IN PUBLIC VIEW.
BUT WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES?

PETITIONS. THINK PIECES. LACKLUSTER BOYCOTTS OF OUR MORE OBVIOUS BRANDS.
NOBODY IMPORTANT CARED.

SO...LET THE WORD GO OUT.
I AM DARIO AGGER, C.E.O. OF THE ROXXON ENERGY CORPORATION, AND THIS IS MY TRUE FORM.
NOBODY WILL CARE.

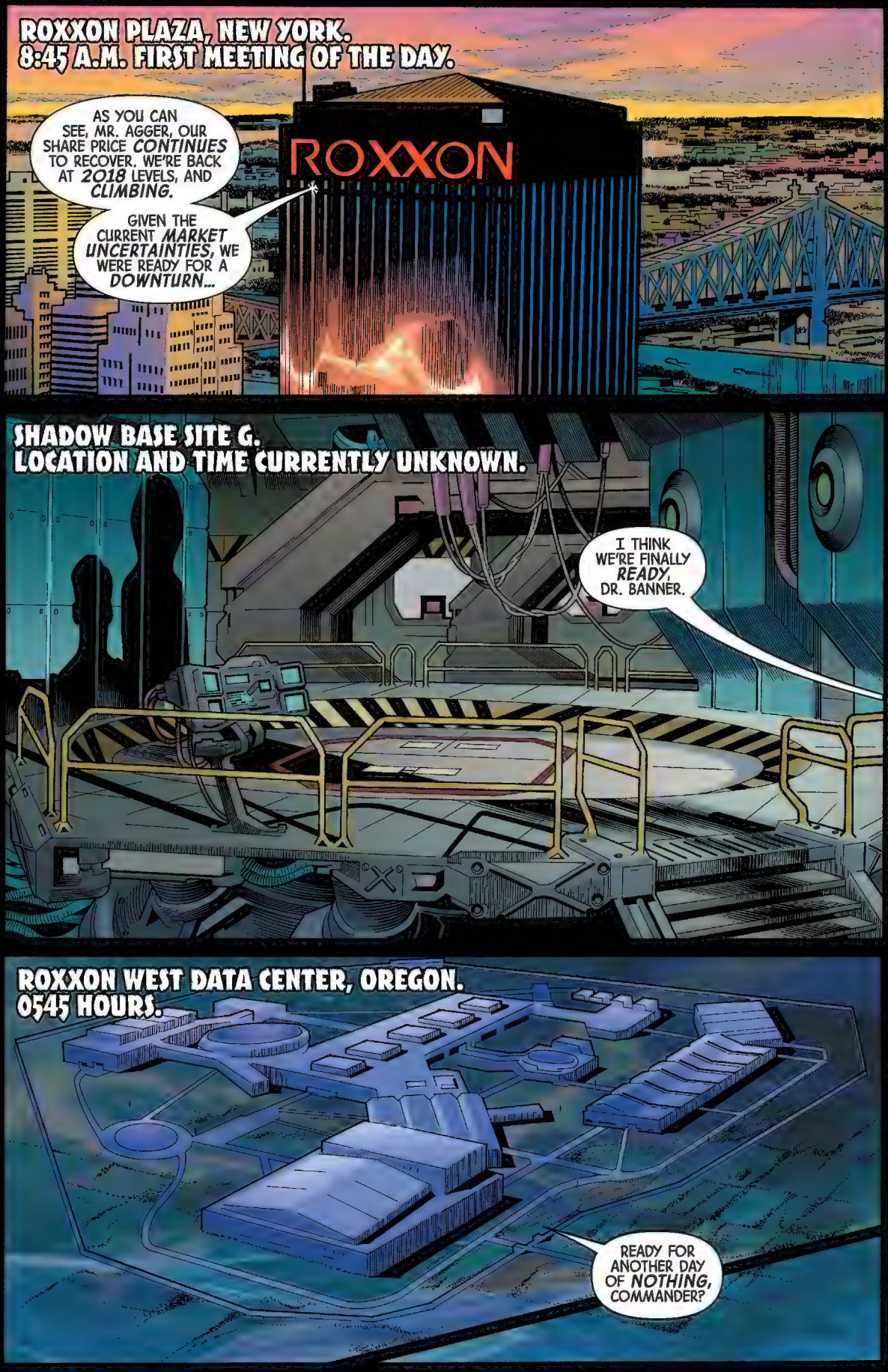
IT'S TOO DIFFICULT TO CARE.
THIS WORLD IS A MAZE OF MONEY AND POWER, IN WHICH HUMAN BEINGS LOSE THEMSELVES.
THEY LIVE THEIR LIVES IN THE LABYRINTH...

# STATUS QUO ANTE

27

"He is finite, though he is powerful to do much harm and suffers not as we do. But we are strong, each in our purpose; and we are all more strong together."

– BRAM STOKER
*DRACULA*


ROXXON PLAZA, NEW YORK.
8:45 A.M. FIRST MEETING OF THE DAY.
AS YOU CAN SEE, MR. AGGER, OUR SHARE PRICE CONTINUES TO RECOVER. WE'RE BACK AT 2018 LEVELS, AND CLIMBING.
GIVEN THE CURRENT MARKET UNCERTAINTIES, WE WERE READY FOR A DOWNTURN...
ROXXON
SHADOW BASE SITE G.
LOCATION AND TIME CURRENTLY UNKNOWN.
I THINK WE'RE FINALLY READY, DR. BANNER.
ROXXON WEST DATA CENTER, OREGON.
0545 HOURS.
READY FOR ANOTHER DAY OF NOTHING, COMMANDER?

...BUT NOTHING TO REPORT ON THAT FRONT AS YET. STILL, I'D SUGGEST AVOIDING RISKY VENTURES--
DON'T BE A COWARD, HIGGINS.
ROXXON
SHARE PRICE
THE MINOTAUR.
WE'RE NOT SOME MOM-AND-POP STORE THAT CLOSES DOWN IN A STRONG WIND. WE...ARE THE HURRICANE.
UNCERTAINTY IS WHAT WE WANT.
I'M STILL NOT CERTAIN ABOUT THIS.
I DON'T CARE HOW EASY REED RICHARDS MAKES IT LOOK-- TRANSLOCATION IS BEYOND DANGEROUS.
THE HULK.
IF IT WERE UP TO ME, YOU WOULDN'T BE DOING THIS AT ALL.
BUT AT LEAST YOU GIVE ME TIME TO RUN THE NECESSARY CHECKS...
YOU HAD BEST CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE, AGENT PALICKI.
SIR--
YOUR JOB IS TO GUARD THIS FACILITY-- UNTIL YOU DROP, IF NEED BE-- WITH ZERO BACKCHAT.
THE ROXXON B.E.R.S.E.R.K.E.R. UNIT.
REMEMBER WHAT YOU ARE. YOU ARE A ROXXON ASSET.
AND THIS IS ROXXON BUSINESS.

BUSINESS DEMANDS UNCERTAINTY. THERE MUST BE WINNERS AND LOSERS. THE STRONG AND THE WEAK.
AND WE ARE THE STRONGEST THERE IS.
I'M A NINE-FOOT MAN-BULL WHO BETRAYED THE EARTH TO ELVES, HIGGINS. YET HERE I STAND.
DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT RISK.
WHAT'S THE WORST POSSIBLE OUTCOME?
WELL, YOU WON'T DISINTEGRATE. OR BECOME A SINGULARITY.
BUT A POWER SURGE COULD STILL TURN YOU INSIDE OUT--
AH, WELL.
I'LL SURVIVE.
YOU SURVIVED THOR AND THE MINDLESS ONES, YOU CAN SURVIVE A LITTLE BOREDOM, PALICKI--
OKAY, SIR--
WHOKK
--WHATEVER YOU SAY!

SHOULD WE PICK OUR BATTLES? ABSOLUTELY.
BUT TO AVOID THEM...?
THERE'LL BE NO AVOIDING THEM, HIGGINS.
WE'VE ALREADY MADE SURE OF THAT.
WELL...IT'S ROXXON. THEY LIKE TO MAKE SURE OF THEIR ASSETS.
THE TARGET YOU'VE PICKED FOR YOUR, AH... OPENING SALVO... IT'S GOING TO BE DEFENDED.
WE'VE ALL HEARD THE RUMORS. ROXXON HAS ACCESS TO... WELL, PEOPLE AT YOUR LEVEL. BUT GAMMA-FREE.
ARE YOU READY FOR THAT KIND OF FIGHT?
COMBAT READINESS DRILL, SIR. GUIDELINES SAY I CAN CALL ONE AT ANY TIME.
GOTTA STAY SHARP, RIGHT? READY TO KILL?
ABOUT TIME, PRIVATE--
--I'VE BEEN NEEDLING YOU FOR WEEKS NOW. WAITING FOR YOU TO FIND YOUR GUTS.
THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER STEP UP...

WHEN I BECAME C.E.O., ROXXON WAS STEPPING UP THEIR RENEWABLE ENERGY PROGRAM.
I TOOK US IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.
NOT THAT I DON'T BELIEVE THE SCIENCE.
EXTREME WEATHER, CROP FAILURE, WILDFIRES... CLIMATE CHANGE WILL DESTABILIZE SOCIETY AS WE KNOW IT.
THE QUESTION IS...WHAT DO WE HAVE TO OFFER?
DOCTOR? I ASKED YOU A--
--HRRNNGH--
OH.
COME ON THEN, PALICKI! HERE'S MINE-- LEMME SEE YOURS!
SHOW ME WHAT YOU GOT!
SHOW ME WHAT YOU ARE!

WEAPONRY.
IN THE COMING RESOURCE WARS, PEOPLE WILL NEED EVERYTHING FROM ASSAULT RIFLES TO MAGICAL SUPER-SOLDIERS.
MAYBE WE'LL EVEN SELL A POLITICIAN OR TWO-- BOUGHT OFF THE RACK OR HOMEGROWN. BUT OUR KIND OF PEOPLE.
THE MASSES LIKE TO SEE STRENGTH IN THEIR LEADERS...
SORRY. SEEING YOU IN THE FLESH, IT'S ALWAYS...
...IT'S ALWAYS TERRIFYING.
HNH. SKIP THE BROWN-NOSING, McGOWAN.
LET'S GO BEFORE THEY START THE SHOW WITHOUT US...
YEAH? YOU WANNA SEE? WANNA SEE WHAT THEY DID TO ME?
WELL-- HRRGGH-- HERE IT IS, SIR--
--AND IT'S GONNA BE THE LAST THING YOU EVER SEE!

TH-THAT SEEMS... AN EXTREME RESPONSE, SIR...
OUR CURRENT PROJECTIONS AREN'T QUITE SO DIRE, ARE THEY?
WE...WE STILL HAVE TIME...TO DO SOMETHING...
...DON'T WE?
WHAT, NOW? YOU'VE GOT MAYBE TEN MINUTES BEFORE SUNUP.
CAN'T IT WAIT UNTIL--
WAIT? FOR WHAT?
EVERY DAY THESE CREEPS ARE STILL OPERATIONAL IS A DAY TOO LONG. YOU KNOW THAT, McGOWAN.
NOW HIT IT.
WHAMM
...
WHAT IN...?

THE--THE *PROJECTIONS*-- THE ENVIRONMENTAL *STUDIES* WE RELEASED, THEY SAY--

AH! WELL, THERE'S YOUR PROBLEM.

YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING AT THE STUDIES WE RELEASED FOR *PUBLIC CONSUMPTION.*

I'LL HAVE TO GIVE YOU CLEARANCE FOR THE *REAL* ONES.

CRACK

PUT IT THIS WAY: THAT *TWELVE-YEAR DEADLINE* IN THE NEWS?

OPTIMISTIC.

I HAVE A LITTLE *PALACE* WAITING IN *ALFHEIM.* I'D FIND A *SIMILAR* BOLT-HOLE, IF YOU CAN.

RIGHT NOW, THE GLOBAL SITUATION IS RELATIVELY STABLE... BUT THINGS *CHANGE,* HIGGINS.

TINK

TINK

"THINGS CHANGE *FAST.*"

GODSPEED, DR. BANNER.

OH GOD... I DIDN'T...I...

MY GRANDCHILDREN...

YOU'RE A RECENT HIRE, AREN'T YOU, HIGGINS?

STILL, I'M SURPRISED AT YOU.

OF ALL THE MANY PRODUCTS WE SELL, THE MOST PROFITABLE AND POWERFUL...IS NARRATIVE.

SELECTIVELY PACKAGED. EXPERTLY TARGETED. HIGHLY POTENT.

CONTROL OF WHAT INFORMATION THE PUBLIC RECEIVES AND BELIEVES IS VITAL TO CONTINUED BUSINESS.

BUT IN THIS ROOM--AT THIS LEVEL--THERE CAN BE NO ILLUSIONS.

WE CANNOT SUCCUMB TO OUR OWN--

SIR--

S-SIR... WHAT DO WE...

WE FIGHT! HE TOOK US BY SURPRISE, THAT'S ALL!

AGENTS CHASE AND KELLER--

--THIS IS YOUR COMMANDER SPEAKING! POWER UP! WE HAVE A HULK SITUATION!

PALICKI AND I WILL HOLD HIM HERE-- BE READY AS A SECOND LINE! WE DEFEND THOSE SERVERS WITH OUR LIVES!

HOLD THE HULK...?

YES!

WE'RE B.E.R.S.E.R.K.E.R.S! WE BATHED IN DRAGON BLOOD--WE'RE STRONGER THAN GODS!

ANY ONE OF US IS A MATCH FOR THE HULK!

YOU GOTTA BE--

KROOMM

HNNH!

--I'M BEING TOLD THERE'S A *HULK ATTACK* CURRENTLY IN PROGRESS.

YOU WANTED TO BE KEPT *INFORMED*...

WELL, WELL. SPEAKING OF *NARRATIVE*...

...LET'S SHOW THE PUBLIC HOW *ROXXON'S HEROES* HANDLE THE NATION'S BIGGEST *BAD GUY*.

HOW SOON CAN OUR B.E.R.S.E.R.K.E.R. UNITS REACH THE SCENE?

THEY'RE... THEY'RE ALREADY *THERE*, SIR. HE'S ATTACKING *US*.

ONE OF OUR DATA CENTERS...THE ONE IN *OREGON*...

...

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

KRAK

YOU-- HRRH--

--TALK TOUGH--

--BUT IF YOU *REALLY* WANT TO BE LIKE *ME*-- BE A *HULK*--

FLAP

--YOU NEED TO SMASH!

HERE. I'LL GET YOU STARTED.

NO-- HOW DID HE--

S-SIR?

HOW DID HE KNOW--

HURRKK--

SKUTCH

MY APOLOGIES, GENTLEMEN.

I FOUND MYSELF IN NEED OF A STRESS BALL.

"I'M AFRAID WE HAVE A SERIOUS PROBLEM."

KRAK-KOOM

COMMANDER...?

KNOCK, KNOCK.

WHO'S THERE?

I SPOKE EARLIER ABOUT CREATING *NARRATIVE.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF *CONTROLLING* PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS.

AS SOME OF YOU KNOW, ROXXON WEST IS THE *BEATING HEART* OF THAT STRATEGY.

IT'S THE SERVER FARM THAT KEEPS *YOUROXX* RUNNING. *ROXXFACE. YAMBLR. THE FORUMS.*

ROXXON'S ENTIRE SOCIAL MEDIA REACH...

...AND OUR *WINDOW* INTO THE SOUL OF MANKIND.

"ROXXON WEST PROCESSES *TRILLIONS* OF TERABYTES PER SECOND. A *GOLD MINE* OF PERSONAL DATA--*PRICELESS*, BUT GIVEN TO US FOR *FREE.*

"ROXXON WEST ALSO RUNS THE *ALGORITHMS* THAT *PROCESS* THAT DATA.

"THAT ALLOWS US TO *TAILOR* INFORMATION TO EACH USER--TO CREATE *LOYALTY*, TO FOSTER *APATHY*, TO TELL *OUR STORY* IN THEIR HEADS.

"I BETRAYED THE EARTH TO ELVES, AND I AM STILL HERE. ROXXON WEST IS *WHY.*

"I PLACED *FOUR* B.E.R.S.E.R.K.E.R. UNITS ON GUARD

"ELITE HULK-LEVEL TROOPS. TRAINED TO ATTACK AND DESTROY WITHOUT HESITATION.

"IF THEY AREN'T ENOUGH...

"...THEN BRUCE BANNER WILL HAVE ACHIEVED SOMETHING PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE.
"HE WILL HAVE HURT THE ROXXON CORPORATION."

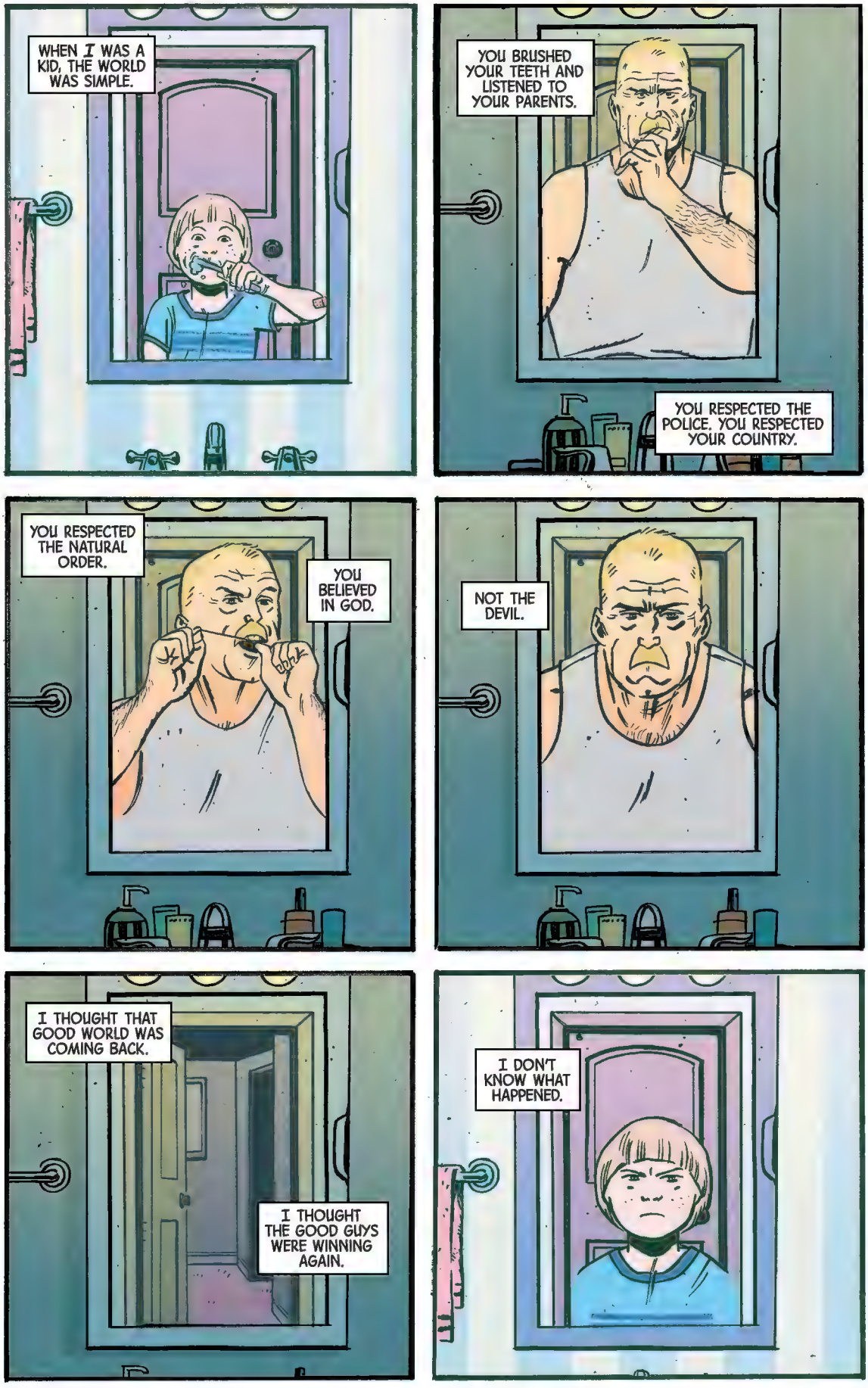
THE...THE SERVERS ARE DOWN, SIR. ALL OF THEM. THE BACKUPS SAVED WHAT THEY COULD, BUT...
...WELL, THE SYSTEM ISN'T DESIGNED FOR...
NO. AND NEITHER ARE WE.
NOT YET.
MEETING ADJOURNED.
I'M ALL DONE HERE.
WHAT'S THE WORD, McGOWAN?
WELL, ROXXFACE STOPPED WORKING, AND I CAN'T GET ANYTHING ELSE TO LOAD, SO...
ROXXFACE
ERROR
PAGE NOT FOUND
...I GUESS DR. BANNER WAS RIGHT. THAT'S HOW YOU HURT THEM.
WE SHOULD TRANSLOCATE YOU BACK--IT'S ALMOST SUNRISE--
YEAH. FIGURED I'D WATCH IT.
WHAT?
I--I THOUGHT--THE SUNLIGHT--
YEAH. THE DAY AIN'T MY TIME. BUT BANNER SHOWED ME I... HRRHH...I COULD FIGHT THAT.
WE CAN FIGHT THAT. WE WORK TOGETHER, McGOWAN.

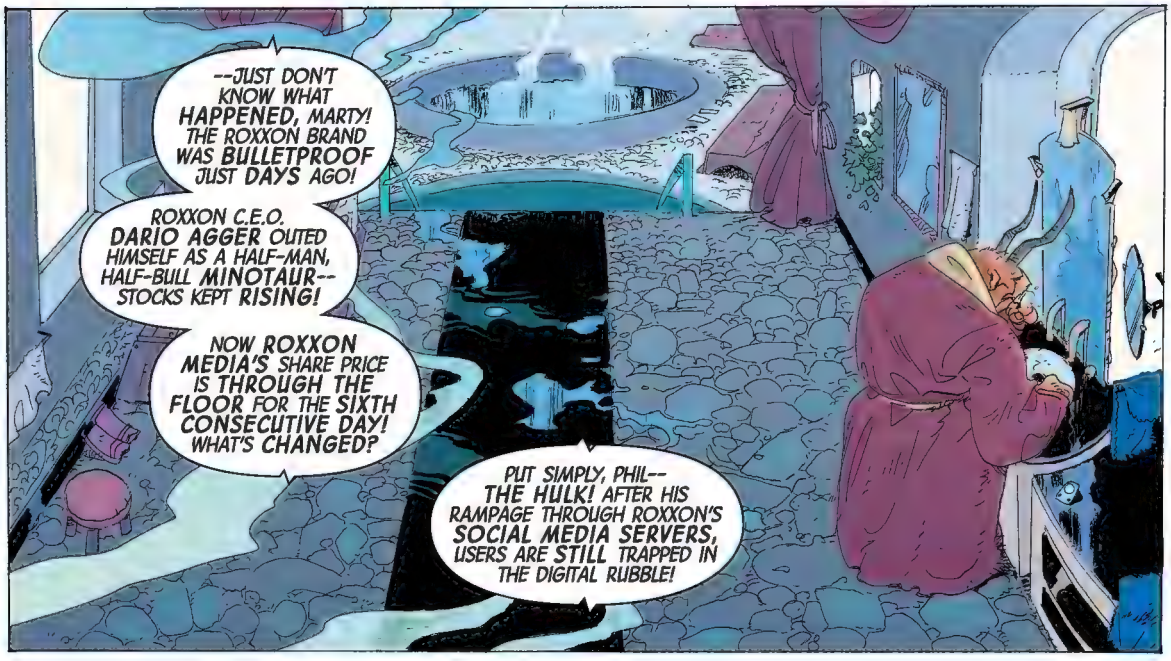
# THIS IS THE DAY

WANTED
BRUCE BANNER

"WE CONSIDERED OURSELVES TO BE A POWERFUL CULTURE."

– U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

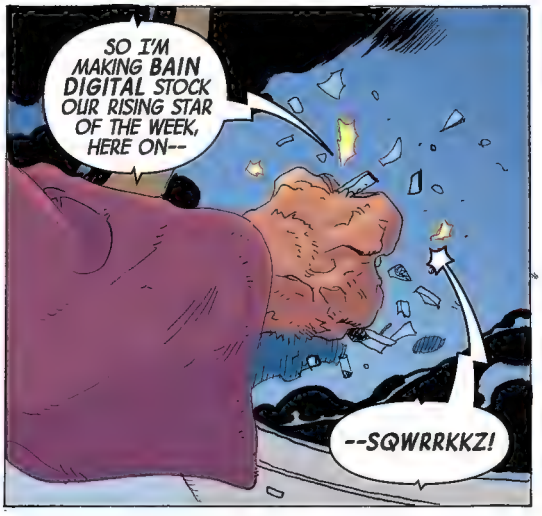

WHEN I WAS A KID, THE WORLD WAS SIMPLE.
YOU BRUSHED YOUR TEETH AND LISTENED TO YOUR PARENTS.
YOU RESPECTED THE POLICE. YOU RESPECTED YOUR COUNTRY.
YOU RESPECTED THE NATURAL ORDER.
YOU BELIEVED IN GOD.
NOT THE DEVIL.
I THOUGHT THAT GOOD WORLD WAS COMING BACK.
I THOUGHT THE GOOD GUYS WERE WINNING AGAIN.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED.


--JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED, MARTY! THE ROXXON BRAND WAS BULLETPROOF JUST DAYS AGO!
ROXXON C.E.O. DARIO AGGER OUTED HIMSELF AS A HALF-MAN, HALF-BULL MINOTAUR-- STOCKS KEPT RISING!
NOW ROXXON MEDIA'S SHARE PRICE IS THROUGH THE FLOOR FOR THE SIXTH CONSECUTIVE DAY! WHAT'S CHANGED?
PUT SIMPLY, PHIL-- THE HULK! AFTER HIS RAMPAGE THROUGH ROXXON'S SOCIAL MEDIA SERVERS, USERS ARE STILL TRAPPED IN THE DIGITAL RUBBLE!

WE'RE TALKING OUTAGES, LOST CONTENT, WHOLE PROFILES GONE MISSING! THE KIDS ARE NOT ALL RIGHT!
MEANWHILE, THE NEW BAINTZ VIDEO APP JUST BROKE HALF A BILLION DOWNLOADS--

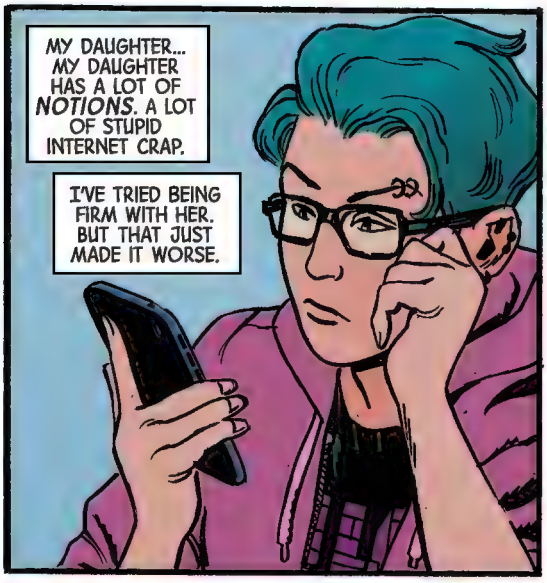
--AND IT'S ON EVERY NEW BAINTECH PHONE!
OUCH! SUSPICIOUSLY GOOD TIMING FROM SUNSET BAIN THERE!

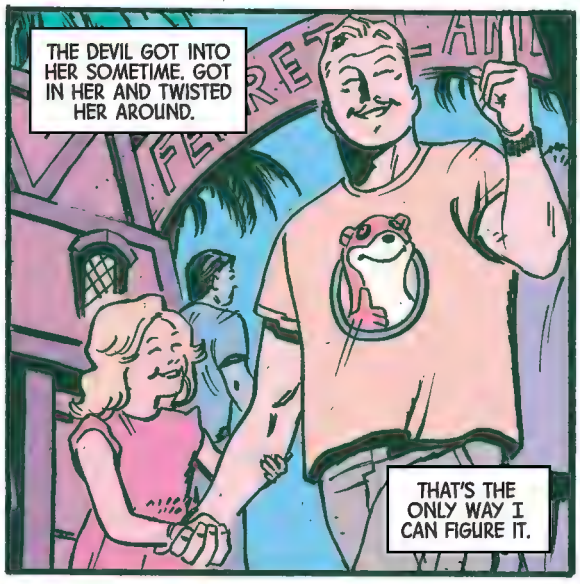
YOU SAID IT, PHIL! AND AS THE USER BASE MIGRATES TO THE HOT NEW PLATFORM, TECH-MINDED SHAREHOLDERS WILL BE FOLLOWING ALONG!


SO I'M MAKING BAIN DIGITAL STOCK OUR RISING STAR OF THE WEEK, HERE ON--
--SQWRRKKZ!

I DRESS FOR WORK. IT'S SUNDAY--THE LORD'S DAY--BUT WE NEED THE OVERTIME.
I FAKE A SMILE FOR THE FAMILY.
PLIP
PLIP
8
10
8
6
4

MY WIFE IS A BLESSING. I HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT. BUT SHE LOOKS SO TIRED ALL THE TIME.
SHE'S NOT AS YOUNG AS SHE WAS.

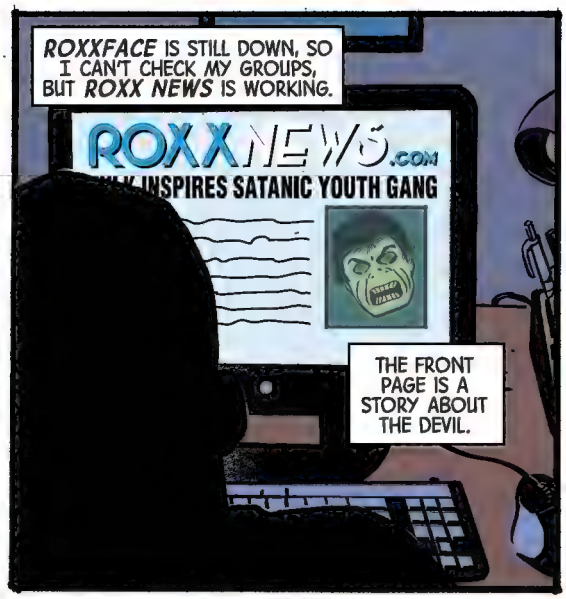

MY DAUGHTER... MY DAUGHTER HAS A LOT OF *NOTIONS*. A LOT OF STUPID INTERNET CRAP.
I'VE TRIED BEING FIRM WITH HER. BUT THAT JUST MADE IT WORSE.


THE DEVIL GOT INTO HER SOMETIME. GOT IN HER AND TWISTED HER AROUND.
THAT'S THE ONLY WAY I CAN FIGURE IT.

WHEN I LOOK AT HER NOW, IT'S LIKE I'M LOOKING AT AN ALIEN.
FROM SOME HOSTILE PLANET, SLOWLY REPLACING MY OWN.

I CAN'T FACE HER. I MAKE AN EXCUSE. KEEP THE SMILE UP.
WHY IS SHE ALWAYS ON THAT PHONE?

IT'S BETTER DOWN HERE.
I CAN BREATHE.


ROXXFACE IS STILL DOWN, SO I CAN'T CHECK MY GROUPS, BUT ROXX NEWS IS WORKING.
ROXXNEWS.com
INSPIRES SATANIC YOUTH GANG
THE FRONT PAGE IS A STORY ABOUT THE DEVIL.

SPIRES SATANIC YOUTH GANG
YOUTH GANGS. RIOTING AND PROTESTING, WEARING HIS FACE, HIS COLORS. IN THRALL TO HIM.
THE "TEEN BRIGADE," THEY CALL THEMSELVES.
CHK!

I'M NOT AFRAID OF THEM. I'VE NEVER SHOWN FEAR IN MY LIFE.
BUT WHEN I'M OUT ON THE STREETS, I LIKE TO BE PREPARED.

PEOPLE LIKE ME-- WE MADE THIS COUNTRY.
9MM
THIS WHOLE DAMN WORLD-- WE MADE IT. FOR OUR CHILDREN.

WE CAN STILL TAKE IT BACK.

ROXXON
HULK SMASH
HHRR.
SIR--I AM SO SORRY ABOUT THE GRAFFITI. WE'LL HAVE IT SCRUBBED OFF BY LUNCH, I SWEAR--
THEY LOVE HIM.
SIR?
THE HULK DESTROYS EVERYTHING HE TOUCHES, AND THE 12-18 DEMOGRAPHIC LOVES HIM FOR IT.
HE'S A MEME. A FIGUREHEAD FOR THEIR TEPID REBELLIONS. THE DESTRUCTIVE URGE MADE FLESH.
WHILE I... THOSE WHO BUILD...
WE HAVE SHAPED THEIR ENTIRE SOCIETY. GIVEN THEM THE WORLD THEY WERE BORN INTO.
NOW, I'M A CYNICAL MAN, RANDOLPH--I PRIDE MYSELF ON THAT. I DO SEE CHILDREN PRIMARILY AS UNITS.
BUT STILL.
WOULD A LITTLE GRATITUDE BE TOO MUCH TO ASK?

IT'S JUST A SECTION OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC, SIR. THIS "HULK CULT," WHATEVER IT IS--IT'S A SUBSET OF THIS POLITICS FAD.
WE'RE STILL REACHING THE OTHERS--
OF COURSE WE ARE.
BECAUSE EVERYONE'S CLICKING ON YOUROXX VIDEOS...
GOT TO LOVE THOSE INFLUENCERS!
THAT WAS SARCASM, YOU IDIOT!
YOUROXX IS DEAD! ROXXON MEDIA IS IN THE TOILET! ARE YOU MAKING FUN OF ME?
UM--WELL, I--I--
I DIDN'T WANT TO CONTRADICT YOU, SIR--
I DON'T NEED YES-MEN, KLEIN!
CORRECT ME ONCE IN A WHILE, IT WON'T KILL YOU--
SIR, THE, UH--
--THE ROOT CAUSE OF ALL THIS IS VERY SIMPLE.
THE HULK IS THE CHAOTIC FACTOR HERE. AND...WELL, WE DID WIN A CONTRACT TO SOLVE THAT PROBLEM...
PERFECT. "SOLVE" THE HULK. WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT?
GET ME COFFEE. LOTS OF IT.
IT'S GOING TO BE A DIFFICULT DAY.

WORK'S PRETTY EASY. THE WYOMING FACILITY IS A SMALL BUILDING--A FEW OFFICES, REALLY. PAPER PUSHERS.
BUT IT STILL NEEDS TO BE GUARDED. EVEN ON A SUNDAY.
ROXXON

I LISTEN TO SHOCK ROXX RADIO TO PASS THE TIME. MIKE "THE MIC" JACOBS, KEEPING IT REAL.
HE'S REALLY OPENED MY EYES. SHOWED ME HOW THE DEEP STATE HELPS THE DEVIL TAKE CONTROL.

I USED TO BE SO NAÏVE.

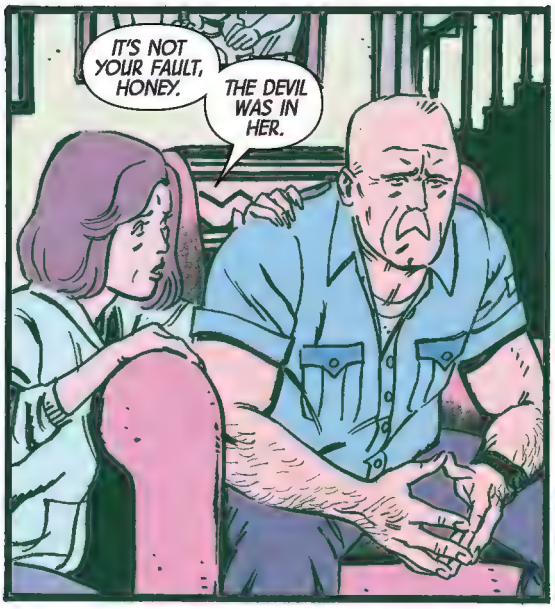
WHEN I HEAR THE CHANTING, I'M INSTANTLY AT FULL COMBAT READINESS.
IT'S LIKE A SWITCH FLIPPING.
I'VE TRAINED MYSELF TO A HIGH LEVEL.

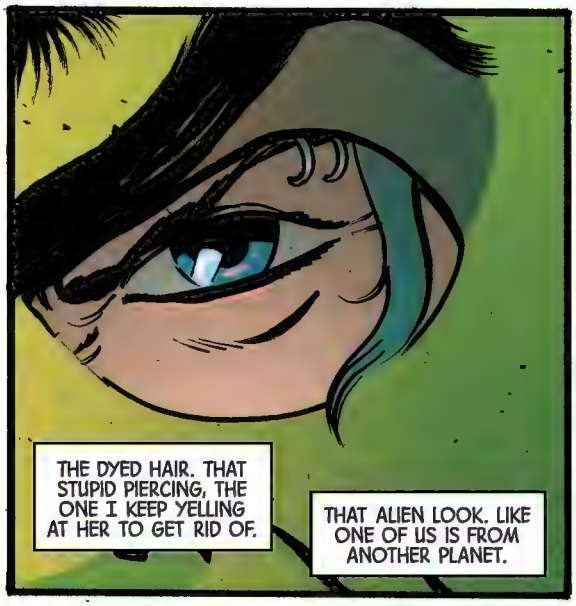
AND IF I'M HONEST, I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT EVER SINCE THIS "TEEN BRIGADE" STARTED PROTESTING ROXXON FACILITIES.

HOPING FOR IT.
THEY MIGHT BE THE DEVIL'S CHILDREN...

...BUT THIS IS MY WORLD.
I KNOW A FEW THINGS THEY DON'T--WITH THEIR MASKS AND THEIR DUMB LITTLE SLOGANS AND PRONOUNS AND COLLEGE TALK.
I KNOW THE LAW. I KNOW ROXXON POLICY. I KNOW I HAVE THE RIGHT TO PROTECT MYSELF IN THIS STATE.
IF I FEEL THREATENED.
"DID YOU FEEL THREATENED?"
ROXX OFF!
"SURE. BUT NEVER AFRAID, YOUR HONOR.
"I'VE NEVER SHOWED FEAR IN MY--"

THAT ONE.
I KNOW HER.


IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, HONEY.
THE DEVIL WAS IN HER.


THE DYED HAIR. THAT STUPID PIERCING, THE ONE I KEEP YELLING AT HER TO GET RID OF.
THAT ALIEN LOOK. LIKE ONE OF US IS FROM ANOTHER PLANET.

THE DEVIL WAS IN HER, SIR.
YOU FELT THREATENED.
YES.

I KNOW HER. BUT...SHE'S WEARING *HIS* FACE. SHE MIGHT AS WELL BE A STRANGER.
SHE MIGHT AS WELL BE A *STRANGER*... AND...
AND...IF I DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS HER...

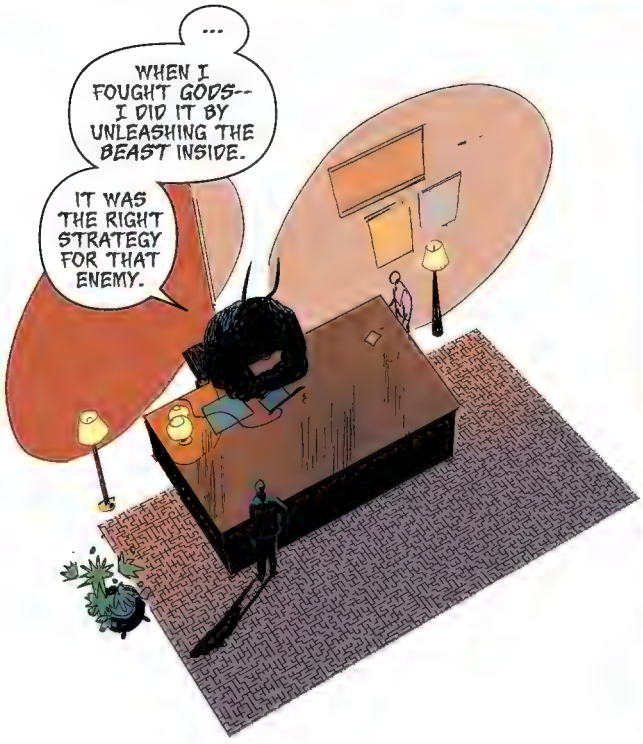
...I COULD FEEL THREATENED.

HERE'S OUR PROBLEM.
WHEN WE TOOK THE CONTRACT FOR ANTI-HULK OPERATIONS, IT WASN'T ABOUT THE HULK.

IT WAS ABOUT MONEY.
A SIMPLE GRIFT. WE'D GET OUR CHECK FROM THE GOVERNMENT, SPEND A THIRD OF IT CHASING THE HULK AROUND, THEN ASK FOR MORE.

EVERYONE WOULD HAVE HAD THEIR KICKBACK. EVERYONE WOULD HAVE PLAYED THE GAME.
BUT THE HULK DOESN'T WANT TO PLAY.

HE WANTS A REAL FIGHT.
CRACK


...
WHEN I FOUGHT GODS-- I DID IT BY UNLEASHING THE BEAST INSIDE.
IT WAS THE RIGHT STRATEGY FOR THAT ENEMY.

GODS ARE GREATER THAN US. HUMANITY'S HIGHEST, MOST ARCHETYPAL SELVES.
TO PRESENT THEM WITH MAN AT HIS WORST...

WELL, HOW DOES THE SAYING GO?
"DON'T MUD-WRESTLE WITH A BULL--YOU BOTH GET DIRTY AND THE BULL LIKES IT."
UH, ACTUALLY, IT'S A PIG.
...
EXCUSE ME?
THE SAYING. IT'S ACTUALLY "DON'T MUD-WRESTLE WITH A--"
KRAG
I DON'T OBJECT TO BEING CORRECTED, RANDOLPH.
NO, SIR.
JUST SO LONG AS IT'S RESPECTFUL.
YES, SIR.
GOOD MAN.
WHERE WAS I?

AH, YES.
THE HULK IS NOT A GOD. HE IS A GOD'S OPPOSITE.

WE CANNOT FIGHT HIM BY CRACKING THE SHELL OF A MAN TO RELEASE THE BEAST.
HE DOES THAT MOVE BETTER THAN WE DO.

WE CAN'T FIGHT HIM WITH RAGE. RAGE IS HIS WORLD. WE HAVE TO FIGHT HIM IN OURS.
WE CHOOSE THE GROUND AND SET THE RULES. BUILD A BOX AND PUT HIM IN IT.

WE CAGE HIM IN A STRUCTURE HE CANNOT ESCAPE.

WE PACKAGE HIM.

...
GET ME PLASTICS.
BZZKT

THE SETTING SUN GLINTS OFF PLASTIC. MY STOMACH DOES A SLOW FLIP.
IN MY HAND, THE GUN FEELS AS WARM AS--AS--

--I JUST WANT IT BACK.
I WANT THE OLD WORLD BACK, THAT'S ALL.

I JUST FEEL THREATENED.

AND THEN THERE'S A SOUND LIKE A BOMB DROPPING.
AND THE GROUND SHAKES SO HARD THE GUN GOES OFF.
BDAM!

AND IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT I WOULD'VE DONE.

THEY'RE CALLED THE "TEEN BRIGADE."
BUT THESE ARE THE DEVIL'S CHILDREN...

...AND THE DEVIL IS HERE FOR HIS OWN.

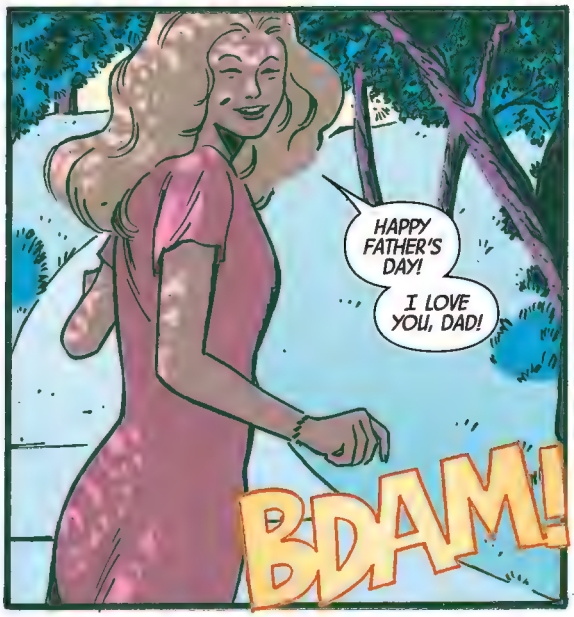
HNH.

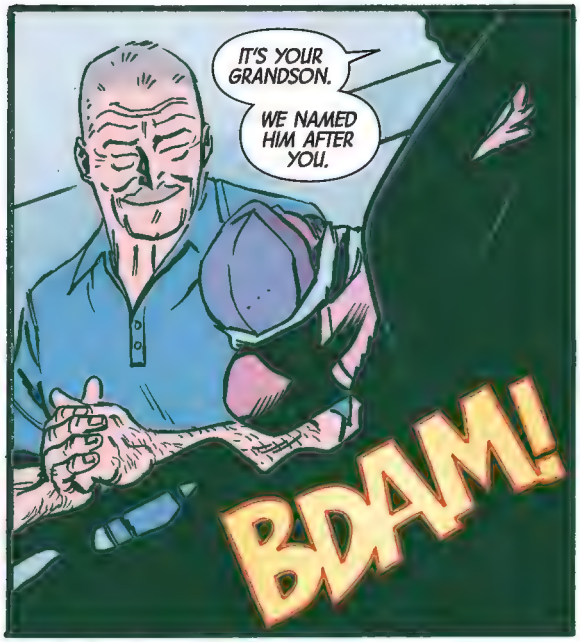
YOU *GET* IT NOW?

THE HUMAN WORLD *ALREADY* ENDED.

WELCOME TO PLANET *HULK.*

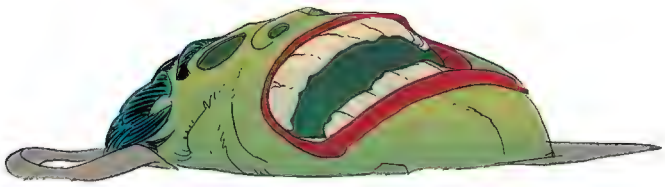
IT'S NOT FAIR. OUR WORLD WAS GOOD.
IT COULD HAVE BEEN--
BDAM!


HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!
I LOVE YOU, DAD!
BDAM!


IT'S YOUR GRANDSON.
WE NAMED HIM AFTER YOU.
BDAM!

WHAT WAS SO WRONG WITH THAT?
BDAM!

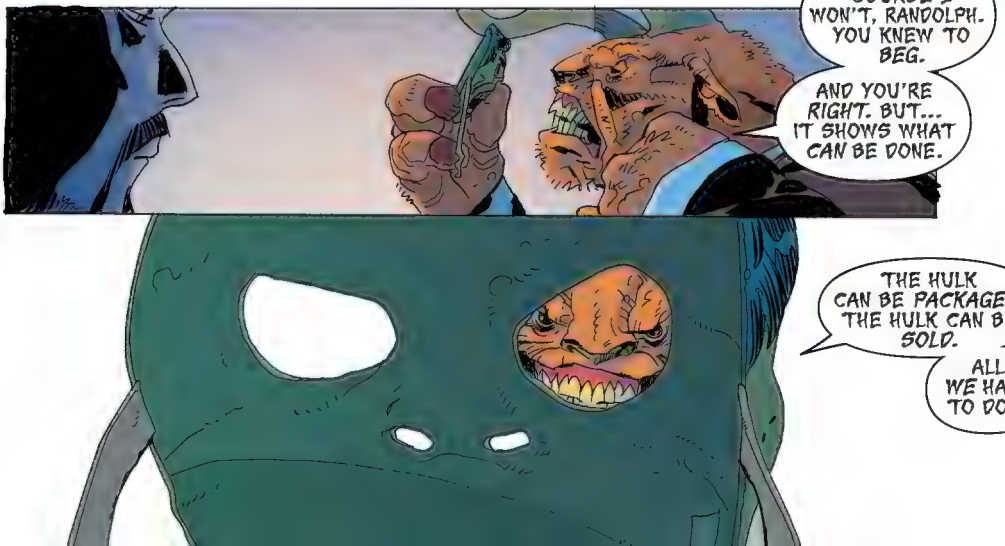
I DON'T KNOW.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED.



EACH MASK COSTS ABOUT NINE CENTS TO MANUFACTURE AT OUR SOKOVIAN PLANT. THEY'RE SELLING FOR $2.99 ONLINE--GOOD MARKUP.
APPARENTLY THERE ARE SOME BIG PROTESTS THIS SUNDAY--WE'RE PUSHING THEM HARD TO BE READY FOR THAT. THROUGH A SHELL COMPANY, OBVIOUSLY.
AND WE'RE TRYING SOME BRANDING EXERCISES THROUGH THE NEWS ARM--WHAT DO YOU THINK OF "HULK'S TEEN BRIGADE"?

A LITTLE...OLD-FASHIONED...
THAT'S DELIBERATE, SIR. THE IDEA IS TO DAMPEN ENTHUSIASM WITH THE 12-18s.
THE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC MASKS WILL HELP THERE, IF THEY CATCH ON--ESPECIALLY WHEN WE LEAK OUR INVOLVEMENT.

BUT...WELL... IF YOUR GOAL WAS MONETARY GAIN, SIR... WE CAN'T MONETIZE THE HULK.
IT'S A GREAT IDEA, SIR, BUT IN PRACTICAL TERMS, IT CAN'T BE DONE. HE'S COSTING US MORE THAN WE COULD POSSIBLY MAKE OFF HIM.
PLEASE DON'T KILL ME.


OF COURSE I WON'T, RANDOLPH. YOU KNEW TO BEG.
AND YOU'RE RIGHT. BUT... IT SHOWS WHAT CAN BE DONE.
THE HULK CAN BE PACKAGED. THE HULK CAN BE SOLD.
ALL WE HAVE TO DO...

"...IS CREATE OUR OWN."

WE'RE HERE, SIR.

MONSTER ISLE.

SIR, PLEASE-- IT'S NOT SAFE--

IT'S DESERTED.

MOST OF THE MONSTERS LEFT TO FOUND SOME RIDICULOUS KINGDOM.

I'M THE WORST THING AROUND FOR MILES, YOU MORON.

WAIT THERE.

HRRR...

EARTHMAN. I HEARD YOU THINKING OF AN OLD ENEMY. OF CAUSING THEM PAIN.

TELL ME IN WORDS.

# THE NEW WORLD

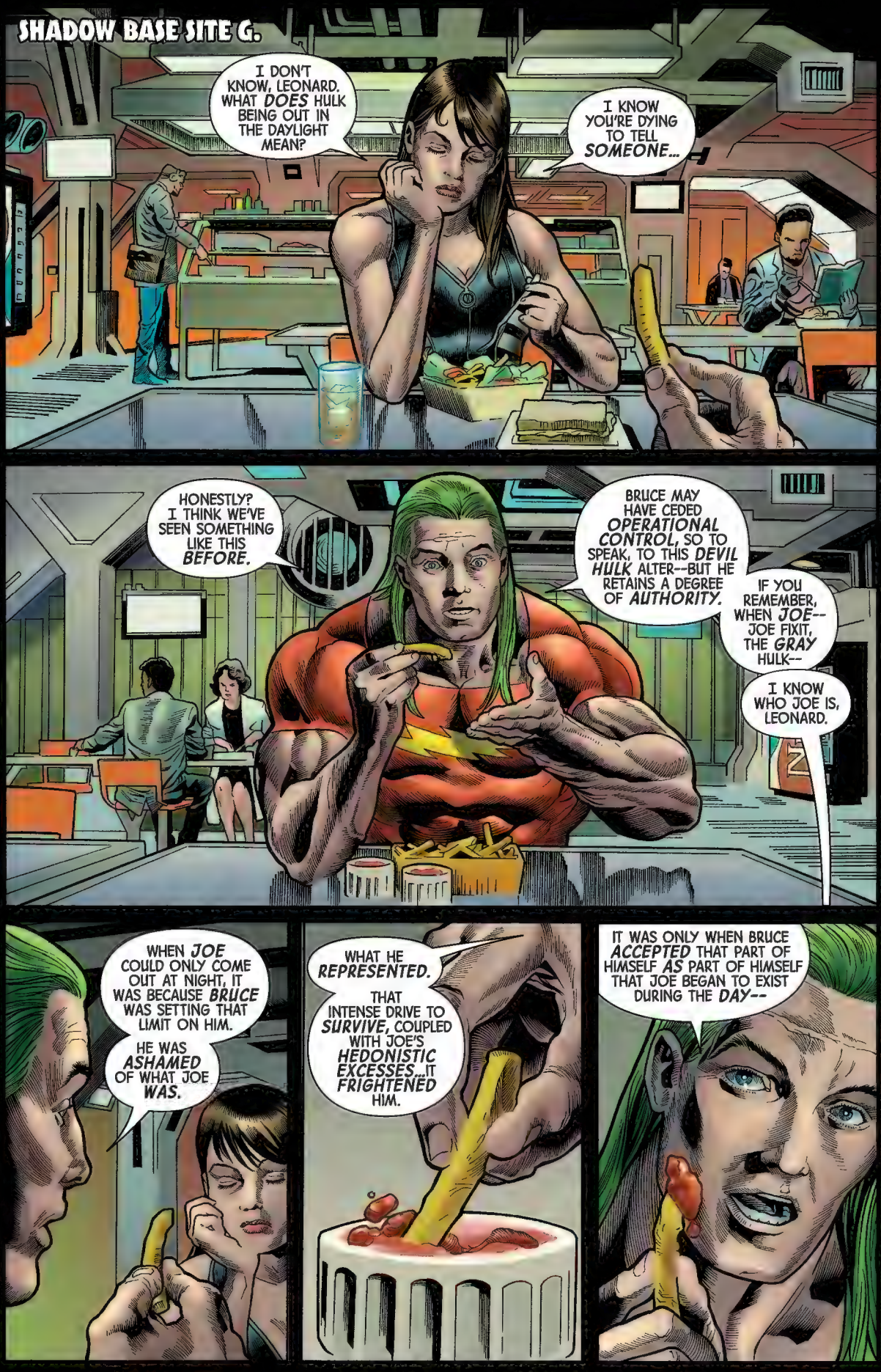
29

“Such is the condition of organic nature! whose first law might be expressed in the words ‘eat or be eaten!’ and which would seem to be one great slaughter-house, one universal scene of rapacity and injustice!”

– ERASMUS DARWIN
*PHYTOLOGIA*

ROXXON PLAZA, NEW YORK.
ROXXON
WE'RE READY TO GO, SIR.
GIVE THE ORDER--WE CAN DEPLOY OUR NEW ASSETS WITHIN THE HOUR.
VERY GOOD, TRAVERS. THOUGH OBVIOUSLY WE'LL WANT TO WAIT FOR NIGHTFALL...
ACTUALLY, SIR--WE'VE TURNED UP SOME INTERESTING INFO ON THAT FRONT.
MY APOLOGIES-- THIS IS, UH, THIS IS A BAINMOTION VIDEO--
JUST GET TO THE POINT, RANDOLPH.
ROXXON
YES, SIR. THIS IS LIVE PHONE FOOTAGE FROM THE PROTEST IN WYOMING LAST SUNDAY.
THE HULK PUT ONE OF OUR SECURITY GUARDS IN THE HOSPITAL, IF YOU REMEMBER.
HE'S CURRENTLY BREATHING THROUGH A--
RANDOLPH.
I ASKED YOU.
TO GET TO THE POINT!
AAKK--

THE...
THE SUN. LOOK AT THE SUN.
IN THE BUH- BACKGROUND.
THE SUN.
...IT WAS STILL DAYTIME.
THE SUN WAS STILL SETTING.
STILL... IT WAS OVERCAST... RAINING...
GUH!
ROXXON
HAS HE BEEN SIGHTED IN FULL DAYLIGHT?
NOT AS YET, SIR.
THEN THERE ARE LIMITS.
THE QUESTION IS, HOW CAN WE MAKE USE OF THEM? HOW CAN THIS WORK FOR US?
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PLAN?
CRACK

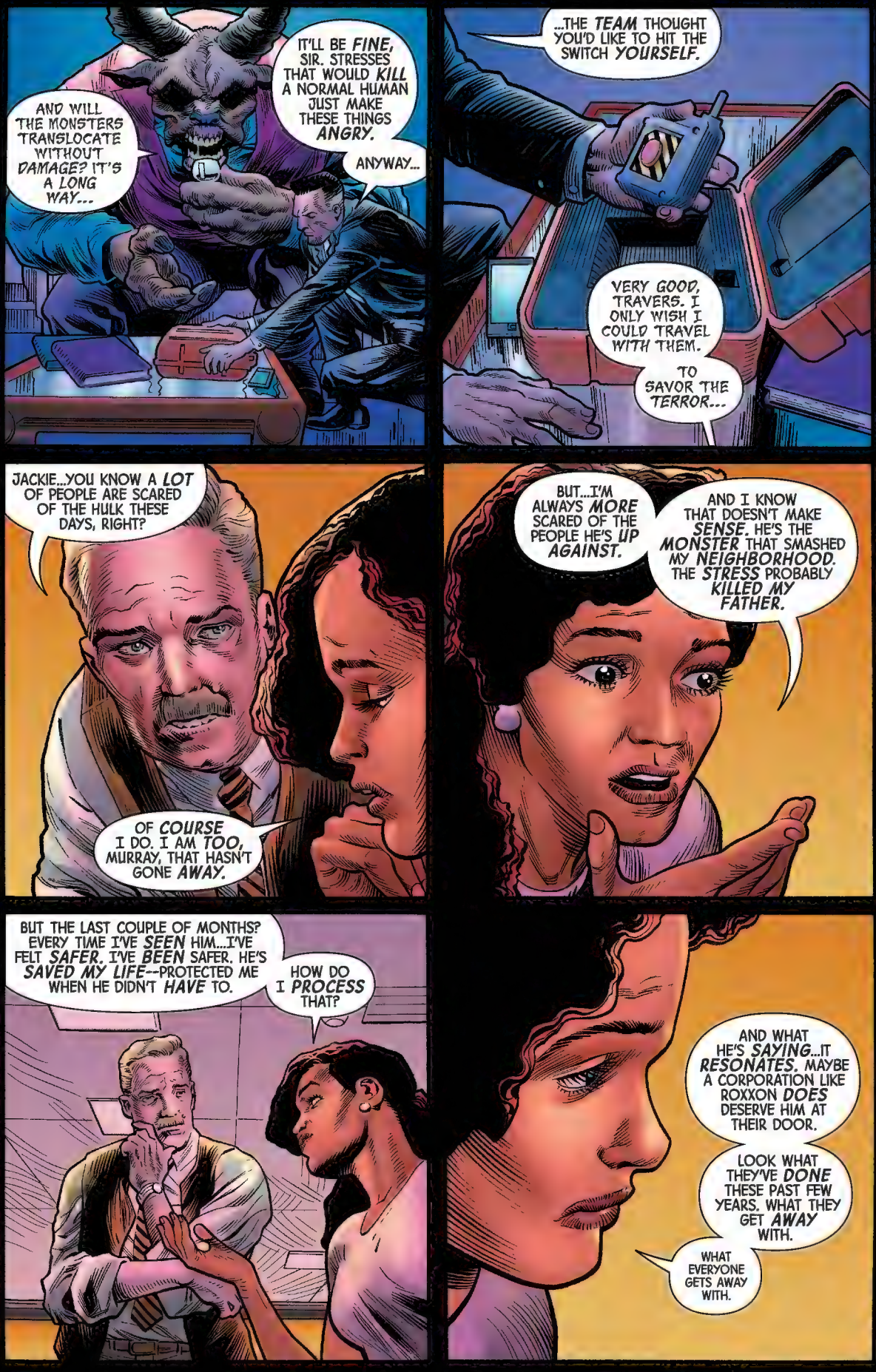

SHADOW BASE SITE G.
I DON'T KNOW, LEONARD. WHAT DOES HULK BEING OUT IN THE DAYLIGHT MEAN?
I KNOW YOU'RE DYING TO TELL SOMEONE...
HONESTLY? I THINK WE'VE SEEN SOMETHING LIKE THIS BEFORE.
BRUCE MAY HAVE CEDED OPERATIONAL CONTROL, SO TO SPEAK, TO THIS DEVIL HULK ALTER--BUT HE RETAINS A DEGREE OF AUTHORITY.
IF YOU REMEMBER, WHEN JOE-- JOE FIXIT, THE GRAY HULK--
I KNOW WHO JOE IS, LEONARD.
WHEN JOE COULD ONLY COME OUT AT NIGHT, IT WAS BECAUSE BRUCE WAS SETTING THAT LIMIT ON HIM.
HE WAS ASHAMED OF WHAT JOE WAS.
WHAT HE REPRESENTED.
THAT INTENSE DRIVE TO SURVIVE, COUPLED WITH JOE'S HEDONISTIC EXCESSES...IT FRIGHTENED HIM.
IT WAS ONLY WHEN BRUCE ACCEPTED THAT PART OF HIMSELF AS PART OF HIMSELF THAT JOE BEGAN TO EXIST DURING THE DAY--

I WAS THERE, LEONARD.
--AND OF COURSE, AS BRUCE HAS BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE WITH JOE, JOE'S BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE IN THE SUN.
"SUNSHINE JOE," AS HE CALLS HIMSELF.
AND BEING OUT IN THE SUN... IT'S AFFECTED HIM. RIGHT FROM THE START.
HE'S NO LONGER HOSTILE TO THE OTHER ALTERS IN THE SYSTEM. HE'S ACCEPTED HIS PLACE IN IT, WORKING FOR THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE.
HE'S NICER. KINDER.
HE THINKS ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE AND THEIR FEELINGS.
MM.
HE STILL MAINTAINS HE DOESN'T LIKE BRUCE... BUT THERE'S NO DENYING THEY'VE GROWN CLOSER.
WHICH, TO ME, RAISES A QUESTION.
DEVIL HULK IS COLDER--MORE BRUTAL--THAN JOE EVER WAS. AND HE'S GOT A LOT MORE AMBITION.
SO IF IT'S HIS TURN TO COME INTO THE LIGHT... DOES THAT MEAN HE'S GETTING MORE LIKE BRUCE?
OR IS BRUCE GETTING MORE LIKE--
LEONARD?

I THOUGHT I HEARD YOUR VOICE.
I WANTED TO APOLOGIZE FOR, AH, MISSING OUR LAST SESSION. I KNOW YOU TALKED TO--
OH.
HELLO, BETTY.
BRUCE.
WE'RE EATING.
I'LL...TALK TO YOU ANOTHER TIME, LEN.
I'VE JUST REMEMBERED I NEED TO, AH... EXAMINE RICK...
...
BETTY...?
LEONARD.
YOU WANT TO TALK?

PHOENIX, ARIZONA.
WHAT'S UP, MURRAY?
I'M JUST DOING A LAST PASS ON THE NEW BANNER STORY--SHOULD BE FIVE MINUTES AWAY FROM YOUR INBOX.
YEAH...YOU MIGHT NEED TO DO ANOTHER PASS AFTER THAT, JACKIE.
YOUR ARTICLES LATELY...THERE'S BEEN SOME TALK. CHATTER.
I GET A LOT OF CHATTER, MURRAY--
SO IF I'M BOTHERING TO TELL YOU, IT'S GOT TO BE BAD, RIGHT?
IT'S NOT JUST THE READERSHIP, JACKIE. IT'S THE BOARD. THEY'RE NOT HAPPY.
ROXXON PLAZA, NEW YORK.
YOU'LL BE HAPPY TO KNOW WE HAVE OUR WINDOW, SIR. ALL POTENTIAL SPOILERS ARE OFF-PLANET OR OTHERWISE DISTRACTED.
TRANSLOCATION TEAM IS STANDING BY--THEY'LL MAKE FINAL PREP WHEN YOU SAY THE WORD. WE'RE USING LOCAL LANDMARKS TO TRIANGULATE--IT'S LIKELY THE ENEMY WILL TOO.
CURRENT LOCAL TIME AT TARGET IS 1630 HOURS--JUST OVER AN HOUR TO SUNDOWN...
SO EITHER HE'LL BE LATE... OR HE'LL BE WEAK. FIGHTING ON TWO FRONTS.
CONSIDER THE WORD SAID.

LOOK, I'M JUST GOING TO SAY IT, JACKIE. I'M WORRIED ABOUT WHAT I'M ALWAYS WORRIED ABOUT WITH YOU.
YOUR DISTANCE WHEN IT COMES TO THE HULK--
MURRAY-- I KNOW.
I KNOW YOU HAD TO PUSH ME BACK INTO THIS. I...I WAS SCARED, I ADMIT IT. OF THEM, OF THEIR WORLD.
BUT...I'M NOT AFRAID ANYMORE.
HOW ARE THE ASSETS? SUITABLY FEARSOME?
O'BRIEN'S LOOKING SKITTISH, BUT HE'LL BE FINE ONCE HIS BLOOD'S UP. HARRYHAUSEN IS RARING TO GO.
OH--AND THEY DIDN'T FEED LOVECRAFT TODAY...
SO HE'S HUNGRY.
I LIKE THAT.
UH-HUH. "LIKE IT OR NOT, THERE IS A HUNGER FOR BANNER'S MESSAGE. THE HULK IS NOT ONLY AN AVATAR FOR HIS RAGE, BUT FOR OUR OWN."
THAT BIT NEEDS A POLISH...
"OUR" RAGE, THOUGH. YOU'RE EXPLICITLY IDENTIFYING WITH HIM IN THE PIECE.
THAT'S WHAT I MEAN ABOUT DISTANCE.


AND WILL THE MONSTERS TRANSLOCATE WITHOUT DAMAGE? IT'S A LONG WAY...
IT'LL BE FINE, SIR. STRESSES THAT WOULD KILL A NORMAL HUMAN JUST MAKE THESE THINGS ANGRY.
ANYWAY...
...THE TEAM THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO HIT THE SWITCH YOURSELF.
VERY GOOD, TRAVERS. I ONLY WISH I COULD TRAVEL WITH THEM.
TO SAVOR THE TERROR...
JACKIE...YOU KNOW A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE SCARED OF THE HULK THESE DAYS, RIGHT?
OF COURSE I DO. I AM TOO, MURRAY, THAT HASN'T GONE AWAY.
BUT...I'M ALWAYS MORE SCARED OF THE PEOPLE HE'S UP AGAINST.
AND I KNOW THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. HE'S THE MONSTER THAT SMASHED MY NEIGHBORHOOD. THE STRESS PROBABLY KILLED MY FATHER.
BUT THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS? EVERY TIME I'VE SEEN HIM...I'VE FELT SAFER. I'VE BEEN SAFER. HE'S SAVED MY LIFE---PROTECTED ME WHEN HE DIDN'T HAVE TO.
HOW DO I PROCESS THAT?
AND WHAT HE'S SAYING...IT RESONATES. MAYBE A CORPORATION LIKE ROXXON DOES DESERVE HIM AT THEIR DOOR.
LOOK WHAT THEY'VE DONE THESE PAST FEW YEARS. WHAT THEY GET AWAY WITH.
WHAT EVERYONE GETS AWAY WITH.

"WHAT EVERYONE GETS AWAY WITH."
HAS HE SAID SORRY?
WHAT?
BANNER. THE HULK. ANY OF HIS ALTERS.
HAVE ANY OF THEM SAID SORRY FOR WHAT THEY DID TO YOU?
TO YOUR FATHER?
...
I...
CLIK
AAH!
WHAT--
WHAT THE HECK WAS--
BRIGHT WHITE FLASH--
AAHH! THAT NOISE-- IT'S LIKE A FOGHORN OR--
--OR A SIREN--
HANG ON--LET ME LOOK--
OUT OF
THE

WINDOW

ROXXON BIO-ASSET #PXK001: "HARRYHAUSEN."

ROXXON BIO-ASSET #PXK002: "O'BRIEN."

ROXXON BIO-ASSET #PXK003: "LOVECRAFT."

ROXXON BIO-ASSET #PXK004: "BRADBURY."

WE GOT AN *ALERT.*
ONE OF THE KIDS--THE *GREEN HOODIES*-- USING THE *#HULKSMASH* TAG. IT'S NOT A *PROTEST* NEEDING *BACKUP* THIS TIME.
IT'S *GIANT MONSTERS* IN *PHOENIX, ARIZONA.*
WE NEED TO PUT YOU INTO THE *FIELD,* DR. BANNER.

...
WHY?
WHAT? DOC, GIANT MONSTERS--
WHY US? THERE ARE A DOZEN SPECIAL RESPONSE GROUPS THAT COULD HANDLE IT.
THE AVENGERS. THE FANTASTIC FOUR. THEY'RE SURELY CAPABLE OF--
--BEING OFF-WORLD RIGHT NOW. I CHECK ON THESE THINGS.
THE CHAMPIONS ARE ON THE EAST COAST WITH NO INSTANT-TRAVEL TECH. THE AGENTS OF ATLAS ARE EVEN FARTHER AWAY.
THE X-MEN ARE BUSY.
EVERYONE'S BUSY.
THIS HAS BEEN TIMED, DR. BANNER.
HMH.
SO IT'S A TRAP.

YEAH. IT'S A ROXXON ATTACK TO DRAW YOU OUT. TEN-STORY MYTHICAL CREATURES-- THEY MIGHT AS WELL HAVE SIGNED IT.
PHOENIX IS WHERE THE ARIZONA HERALD IS BASED, DR. BANNER.
JACKIE.
I KNOW. I KNOW.
I'M NOT BEING GIVEN A CHOICE.
AM I?
AN ATTACK DESIGNED TO MAKE ME LOOK LIKE A SUPER HERO COMING TO THE RESCUE. ME.
US.
WHAT'S THE OTHER SHOE?
RICK. DR. McGOWAN.
CAN YOU GIVE ME A MOMENT TO GET CHANGED?

I'VE GOT CALIBRATIONS LOGGED FOR EACH OF YOU--BUT NOT ALL OF YOU TOGETHER. YOU'LL HAVE TO GO IN ONE AT A TIME.
WHAT ABOUT LOCATION? DON'T YOU NEED TO CALIBRATE FOR THAT AS WELL?
ONCE WE HAVE THE BASICS--EARTH'S SPEED AND ROTATION, SIZE AND MASS OF THE OBJECT SENT--IT'S EASIER TO LOG DESTINATIONS IN ADVANCE.
WE HAVE AROUND THREE HUNDRED PLACES LOGGED IN AMERICA SO FAR. A HUNDRED MORE WORLDWIDE. TWO IN PHOENIX--LOCAL LANDMARKS.
THE IDEA IS, WE PUT YOU CLOSE TO THE ACTION--YOU CAN JUMP THE REST OF THE WAY. OR FLY...
HULK. HOLDING UP?
IT'S STILL DAY, BETTY.
THAT AIN'T GREAT.
IT'S LIKE AN ITCH IN MY HEAD. IT STILL FEELS WRONG.
IF THIS WAS TIMED--THEY KNOW IT THROWS ME OFF.
HM.
BE CAREFUL.
PLATFORM'S CHARGED!
THEN HIT IT, McGOWAN.
AND BETTY--RELAX. IT'LL BE...

...
HNH.

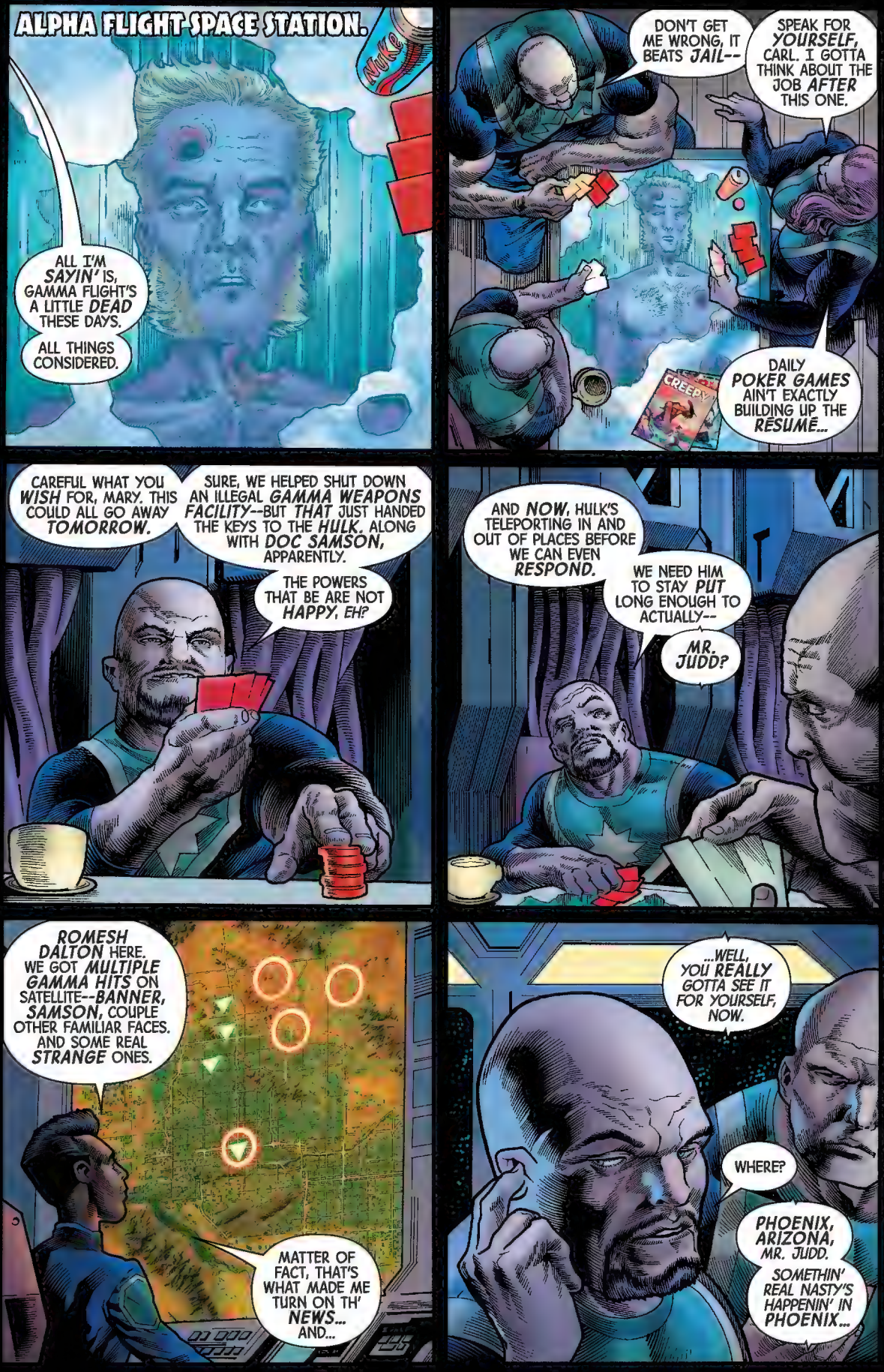
HA! DOWN THE HATCH!
TALK ABOUT A GRAND ENTRANCE-- OR IS THAT A GRAND ENTRÉE?
MTN
MONSTER RAMPAGE IN PHOENIX, AZ--WADE WILSON UNAVAILABLE FOR COMMENT
WELL, LET'S NOT LET OUR PET EAT ALONE. TELL THE KITCHEN TO PREPARE THE LOBSTER.
AND BRING ME ALL THE DATA WE HAVE ON BANNER AND HIS CURRENT ALLIES.
AS IN EVERYTHING. WITH ROXXON MEDIA LOST TO US, WE'LL HAVE TO EMPLOY A CERTAIN DEGREE OF... FINESSE.
BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME, WE HAVE THE HULK WHERE WE WANT HIM.
AND IF HE CAN'T BE KILLED? THAT'S FINE BY ME.
I WANT TO DO MUCH, MUCH MORE THAN JUST KILL HIM.
I WANT TO CONSUME HIS ESSENCE.
ONCE WE'VE EATEN THE HULK...
MMA MUTATES SIGHTED AT SCENE OF MONSTER ATTACK

# EAT OR BE EATEN

30

"WATCH THEREFORE: FOR YE KNOW NOT WHAT HOUR YOUR LORD DOTH COME."

– MATTHEW 24:42


ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
ALL I'M SAYIN' IS, GAMMA FLIGHT'S A LITTLE DEAD THESE DAYS.
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED.
DON'T GET ME WRONG, IT BEATS JAIL--
SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, CARL. I GOTTA THINK ABOUT THE JOB AFTER THIS ONE.
CREEPY
DAILY POKER GAMES AIN'T EXACTLY BUILDING UP THE RESUMÉ...
CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR, MARY. THIS COULD ALL GO AWAY TOMORROW.
SURE, WE HELPED SHUT DOWN AN ILLEGAL GAMMA WEAPONS FACILITY--BUT THAT JUST HANDED THE KEYS TO THE HULK, ALONG WITH DOC SAMSON, APPARENTLY.
THE POWERS THAT BE ARE NOT HAPPY, EH?
AND NOW, HULK'S TELEPORTING IN AND OUT OF PLACES BEFORE WE CAN EVEN RESPOND.
WE NEED HIM TO STAY PUT LONG ENOUGH TO ACTUALLY--
MR. JUDD?
ROMESH DALTON HERE. WE GOT MULTIPLE GAMMA HITS ON SATELLITE--BANNER, SAMSON, COUPLE OTHER FAMILIAR FACES. AND SOME REAL STRANGE ONES.
MATTER OF FACT, THAT'S WHAT MADE ME TURN ON TH' NEWS... AND...
...WELL, YOU REALLY GOTTA SEE IT FOR YOURSELF, NOW.
WHERE?
PHOENIX, ARIZONA, MR. JUDD.
SOMETHIN' REAL NASTY'S HAPPENIN' IN PHOENIX...

--FOUR GIANT MONSTERS ON THE RAMPAGE--INCLUDING THE ONE YOU SEE BEHIND ME, DESTROYING THE ROUTE 60 INTERCHANGE!

MTN BREAKING NEWS

WE'VE BEEN INFORMED THAT THERE ARE NO SUPERHUMAN SPECIAL RESPONSE GROUPS AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME--

--HOWEVER, THE GAMMA MUTATES RICK JONES AND LEONARD SAMSON HAVE BEEN SIGHTED, WITH SOME REPORTING A NEW RED SHE-HULK IN TOW.

ARE THEY FIGHTING THE MONSTERS? GOADING THEM ON?

THEIR LEADER, BRUCE BANNER, COULD ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS--

--BUT HE REMAINS UNAVAILABLE.

WET CAVE-- FULL OF BUGS! BUGS AND SLIME THAT BURNS!

WHY HULK WAKE HERE? WHY HULK LEFT HERE WITH BUGS AND SLIME? WHY? WHY?

WHY HULK ALWAYS HURT?

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?
OH GOD, I CAN HEAR IT.
OVER EVERYTHING-- GOD, OVER THE SCREAMING--
I CAN HEAR IT... THE WINGS... BEATING...
IT'S CIRCLING THE BUILDING.
MURRAY-- DAMMIT, MURRAY, DON'T QUIT NOW--
HUFF--I'M-- HFF--TOO SLOW, JACKIE--JUST SLOWING YOU DOWN--
GO WITHOUT ME--
NO! THAT'S NOT HAPPENING!
JUST KEEP MOVING! WE CAN MAKE IT IF WE KEEP TO THE EMERGENCY--

AAAAHH!
--STAIRWELL--
OH GOD--
IT--IT JUST--
THROUGH THE DOOR--
IT JUST--
EVERYBODY--
THIS WAY!
WE CAN GET TO THE OPPOSITE STAIRWELL FROM HERE--BUT WE NEED TO MOVE--
WE NEED TO--

NO--
GO! LEAVE ME!
JUST GO!
I-IT'S--
IT'S TOO LATE.
...
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ITS EYES?

JACKIE. HEY.
I WAS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.
THOUGHT I'D STOP BY.
HOW ARE THINGS?
HOW ARE THINGS...? I...I JUST...
I JUST SAW...MY CO-WORKERS, MY FRIENDS, JUST...DIE...
...AND YOU'RE CRACKING JOKES?
YOU'RE TELLING JOKES, RICK?
WAS THIS YOU?
INDIRECTLY? I GUESS SO.
AND...I'M SORRY. I PUT ON THIS ACT...I DON'T ALWAYS KNOW WHAT'S APPROPRIATE.
HAVE YOU SEEN BRUCE ANYWHERE?

TV CAUGHT IT. MCGOWAN TOLD ME.
HE WAS SWALLOWED. THE ONE ON THE INTERCHANGE.
GOOD THING WE WEREN'T TOGETHER.
BETTY--HAVE YOU NOTICED THAT WHEN YOU'RE HARPY, YOU NEVER SAY MORE THAN FIVE OR SIX WORDS AT A TIME?
I'VE BEEN COUNTING. IT'S FASCINATING.
WHY USE MORE?
YOU LIKE TO TALK.
FINE. NEW TOPIC OF CONVERSATION-- I CAN'T FIGHT A THING THAT VOMITS LAVA.
MY SKIN'S NOT TOUGH ENOUGH. I'LL JUST BURN TO DEATH.
AND THEN I'LL COME BACK, AND DO IT AGAIN, AND--
WELL, WELL, LOOK WHO IT AIN'T.
HOW'S IT GOIN', JUDAS?
NOW NOW, MR. CREEL.
I'M SURE LEONARD HAD EXCELLENT REASONS TO LEAVE US UNCONSCIOUS IN A WRECKED GAMMA FACILITY AND JOIN UP WITH AMERICA'S PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1.

GOOD THING I'M NOT AMERICAN, OR I MIGHT BE ANNOYED ABOUT THAT.
HEY, I'M ANNOYED. YOU KNOW HOW MUCH WORK I'VE PUT INTO BEIN' PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1?
NO TRUE ARTIST IS APPRECIATED IN HIS OWN TIME, MR. CREEL.
FINE, I GET IT. I'M SORRY. CAN WE DO THIS WHEN PEOPLE AREN'T DYING?
I'M ASSUMING YOU'RE NOT HERE TO TAKE US IN...
FUNNY HOW THAT WORKS, EH? EVERY TIME WE GET THE CHANCE, SOMETHING BIGGER COMES ALONG TO TEAM UP AGAINST.
UNFORTUNATELY, THE BOSSES ARE STARTING TO NOTICE, LEN. WORD OF WARNING:
THE NEXT GAMMA FLIGHT WON'T BE QUITE SO UNDERSTANDING--
GREAT. MESSAGE RECEIVED.
CAN WE FIGHT THE MONSTERS, PLEASE?
HA! TRUST ME, SAMSON.
THAT PART'S TAKEN CARE OF.

HURRP

HEY!

LAVA GUY, RIGHT?

RRUURRP?

GREAT.

LAVA'S A *FRIEND* OF MINE.

HERE COMES THE *AIRPLANE*--

HUKK!

HRRK-- HUKK--

AWW, THAT GO DOWN THE WRONG *HOLE*? CHOKE IT DOWN, BABY BOY.

*TITANIA'S* GOT *MORE*.

THE LAVA CREATURE IS STAGGERING-- AND--YES, IT'S DOWN--
I'M BEING TOLD HE WAS FELLED BY TERRANIA--THE NEWEST ADDITION TO THE GAMMA RESPONSE UNIT GAMMA FLIGHT--
"TITANIA," YOU MORON. ALIAS MARY MACPHERRAN.
CONVICTED OF ROBBERY, ASSAULT, ATTEMPTED MURDER. A DANGEROUS SUPER-POWERED FELON--AND YET SHE WAS PAROLED DESPITE ALL THAT.
I THINK IT'S OUR DUTY AS CITIZENS TO SEE SUCH ERRORS CORRECTED...
WHO'S NEXT?
DR. CHARLENE MCGOWAN, SIR. WE'VE ALREADY RUN SEVERAL STORIES ABOUT HER TIME RUNNING A DRUG LAB...
BUT NOT ABOUT WHAT'S ON THE VERY FIRST PAGE OF THIS FILE...
IT--THAT INVOLVES PRIVATE MEDICAL RECORDS, SIR. I FELT USING IT MIGHT CREATE SOME, AH, LEGAL ISSUES.
BESIDES, IT-- IT REALLY DOESN'T SEEM OUR BUSINESS--
OH, RANDOLPH.
AND YOU WERE DOING SO WELL.
AAAH--
BREAKING NEWS--

DOC SAMSON AND--AND WE'RE STILL NOT SURE WHAT THAT IS--
DOC SAMSON AND HIS ACCOMPLICE ARE APPROACHING THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT, AND--
OH!
THAT SOUND-- LIKE A CLAP OF THUNDER--
--THAT WAS ITS SKULL CRACKING--IT'S--
IT'S DOWN!
THE CREATURE IS DOWN!

DEAD?
I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T THINK IT'S BREATHING, BUT THERE'S--WAIT.
THIS WOUND YOU MADE... SOMETHING'S MOVING IN IT.
LOTS OF SOMETHINGS. TRYING TO GET OUT...
SOME KIND OF INTERNAL PARASITES.
EACH ONE OF THESE THINGS IS A...A HIVE. A SHELL.
IF WE'D BROKEN THEM FULLY OPEN...
OH NO.
YOU--YOU SAID ONE OF THESE ATE BRUCE?
HM.
THE LAST MONSTER--IT'S TWITCHING-- SPASMING--

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING TO IT--
OUT...
OUT!
HULK OUT FROM BUGS AND SLIME! OUT INTO AIR!
WHO DID THIS? WHO DID THIS TO HULK?
HULK WILL KNOW--

--OR HULK WILL SMASH!

SMASH!

BREAKING--
BREAKING NEWS--
A WAVE OF-- OF HORROR-- SWARMING OVER THE INTERCHANGE--
STUPID BUGS! TELL HULK!
TELL HULK WHO!
I--I CAN'T DESCRIBE WHAT I'M SEEING--BUT--
BUT THE HULK IS AT THE CENTER--HE UNLEASHED THIS ON US!
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER--THE HULK CAUSED THIS--
PERFECT.
MTN BREAKING NEWS
I COULDN'T HAVE SAID IT BETTER MYSELF.

WHETHER ACCIDENTALLY OR--OH GOD--
THEY'RE COMING THIS WAY--
OUR FINAL ASSET IS TAKING HIS TIME, SIR...
MTN
BREAKING NEWS

HE'S A BORN SHOWMAN, TRAVERS. A VIRTUOSO OF THE SMALL SCREEN.
HE'S GOING TO WANT TO MAKE THE RIGHT ENTRANCE...

RUN!
RUN!
AAAAAHHH--

WHAT...?

IF...IF YOU'RE STILL WATCHING, THE CREATURE IS RISING INTO THE AIR. LIKE A... A MIRACLE, OR...
I CAN SEE A...A LARGE FIGURE...
WHO IS THAT?

WHITE-THING.
HELLO.
HELLO, HELLO.

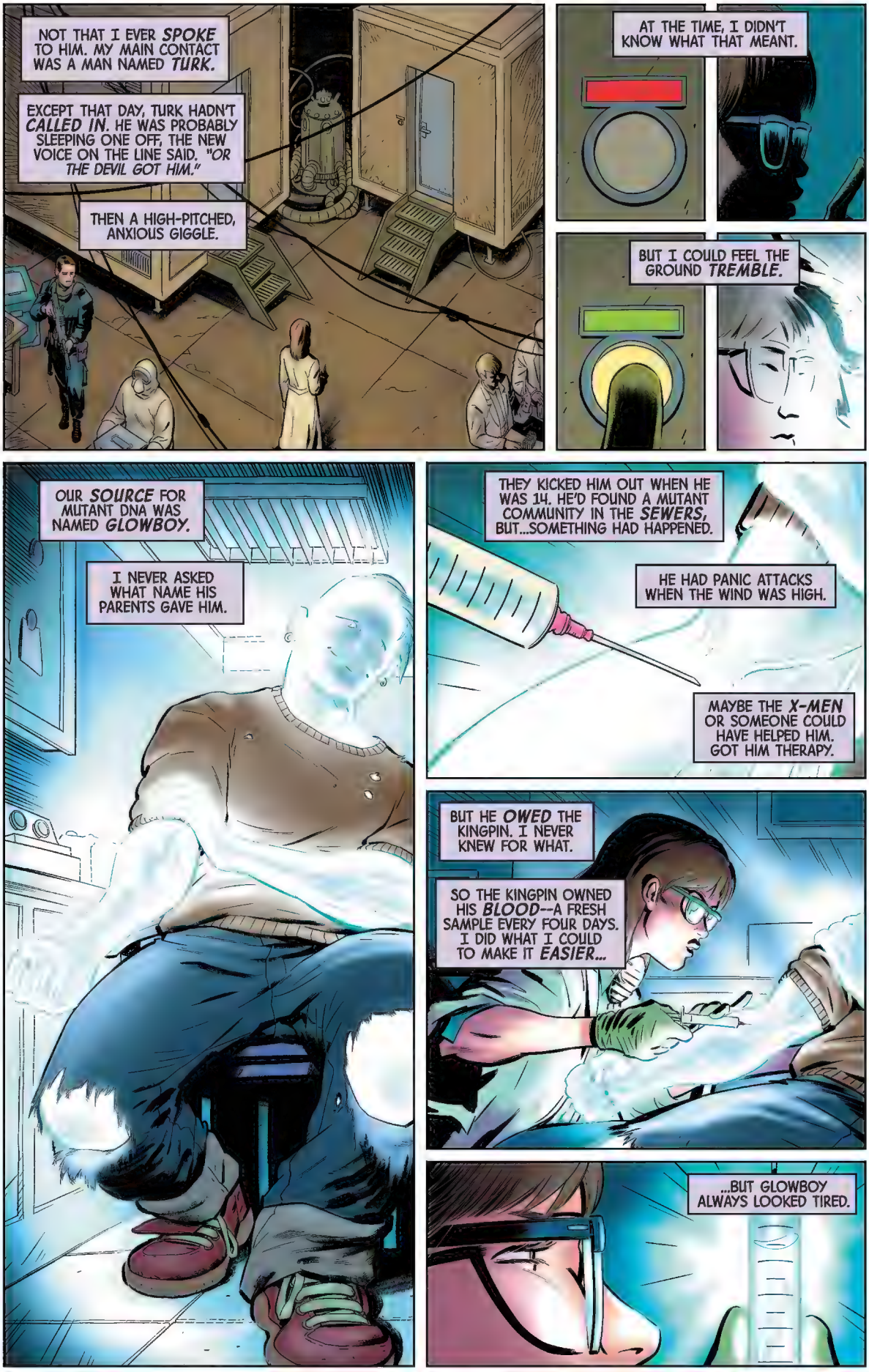
# COMETH THE HOUR

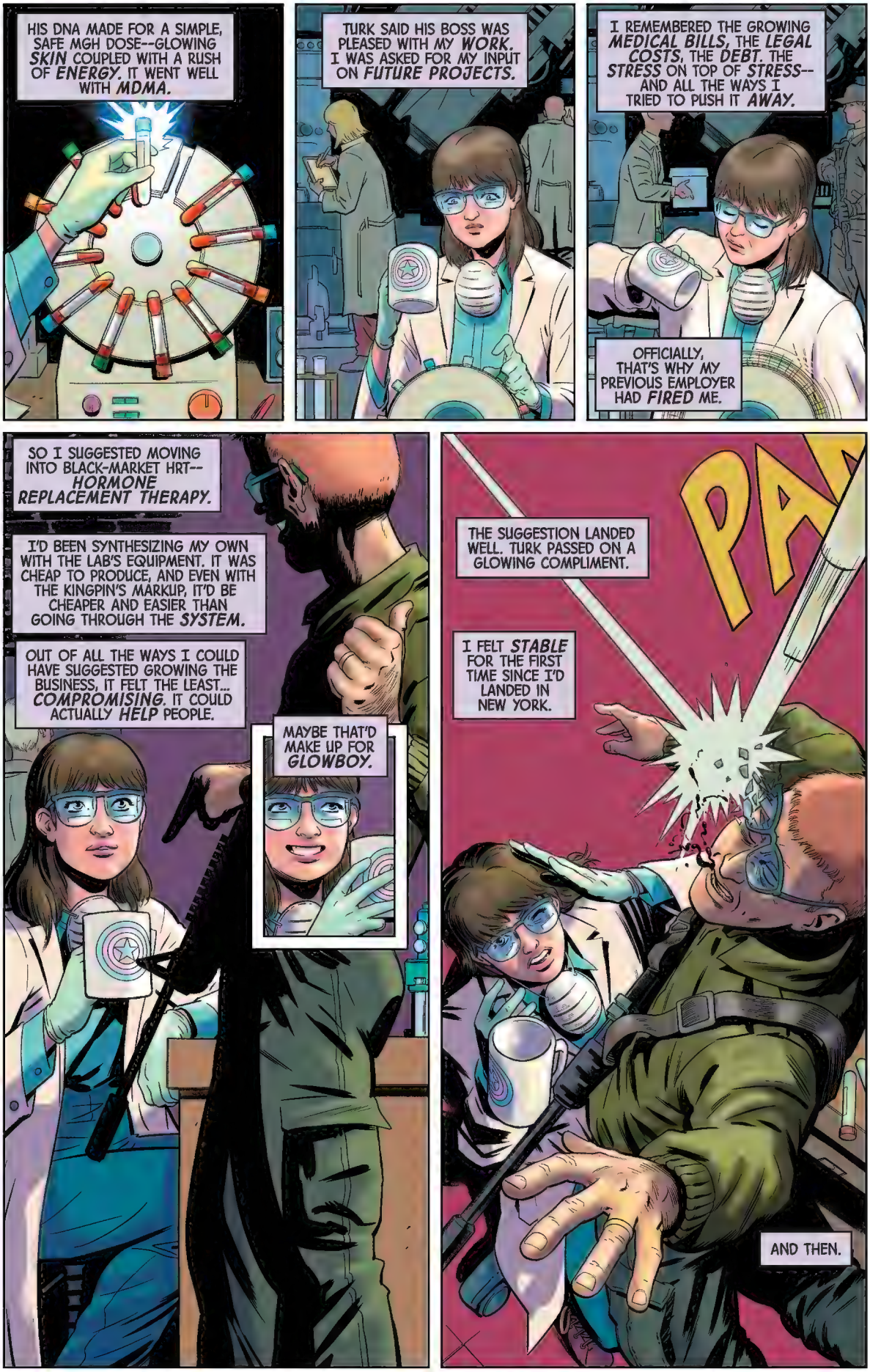
31
XEMNU
XEMNU
XEMNU
XEMNU

"Thou comest as the memory of a dream, which now is sad because it hath been sweet."

– PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
*PROMETHEUS UNBOUND*

THEN.
THERE'S A FEELING YOU GET.
WHEN YOU'VE GOTTEN SO USED TO "JUST FOR A WHILE" THAT IT FEELS LIKE FOREVER. THINGS AREN'T SAFE, BUT THEY'RE STABLE--ALL UNDER CONTROL, YOU IMAGINE.
AND THEN YOU FEEL THE GROUND SHIFT UNDER YOUR FEET. JUST A LITTLE, AND YOU REALIZE IT'S ALREADY FALLING APART.
THE LAST TIME I FELT IT WAS YEARS AGO. I WAS 2,400 MILES FROM HOME, AND I WORKED IN A DRUG LAB.
MUTANT GROWTH HORMONE--IT CAN BE A SUPER-SOLDIER DRUG OR A PARTY DRUG. HIGHLY TOXIC OR RELATIVELY BENIGN.
THAT GOES FOR THE MANUFACTURING AS WELL. BUT I WAS LUCKY.
THE KINGPIN PREFERRED "BENIGN."
LESS MESS THAT WAY.


NOT THAT I EVER SPOKE TO HIM. MY MAIN CONTACT WAS A MAN NAMED TURK.
EXCEPT THAT DAY, TURK HADN'T CALLED IN. HE WAS PROBABLY SLEEPING ONE OFF, THE NEW VOICE ON THE LINE SAID. "OR THE DEVIL GOT HIM."
THEN A HIGH-PITCHED, ANXIOUS GIGGLE.
AT THE TIME, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANT.
BUT I COULD FEEL THE GROUND TREMBLE.
OUR SOURCE FOR MUTANT DNA WAS NAMED GLOWBOY.
I NEVER ASKED WHAT NAME HIS PARENTS GAVE HIM.
THEY KICKED HIM OUT WHEN HE WAS 14. HE'D FOUND A MUTANT COMMUNITY IN THE SEWERS, BUT...SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED.
HE HAD PANIC ATTACKS WHEN THE WIND WAS HIGH.
MAYBE THE X-MEN OR SOMEONE COULD HAVE HELPED HIM. GOT HIM THERAPY.
BUT HE OWED THE KINGPIN. I NEVER KNEW FOR WHAT.
SO THE KINGPIN OWNED HIS BLOOD--A FRESH SAMPLE EVERY FOUR DAYS. I DID WHAT I COULD TO MAKE IT EASIER...
...BUT GLOWBOY ALWAYS LOOKED TIRED.


HIS DNA MADE FOR A SIMPLE, SAFE MGH DOSE--GLOWING SKIN COUPLED WITH A RUSH OF ENERGY. IT WENT WELL WITH MDMA.
TURK SAID HIS BOSS WAS PLEASED WITH MY WORK. I WAS ASKED FOR MY INPUT ON FUTURE PROJECTS.
I REMEMBERED THE GROWING MEDICAL BILLS, THE LEGAL COSTS, THE DEBT. THE STRESS ON TOP OF STRESS-- AND ALL THE WAYS I TRIED TO PUSH IT AWAY.
OFFICIALLY, THAT'S WHY MY PREVIOUS EMPLOYER HAD FIRED ME.
SO I SUGGESTED MOVING INTO BLACK-MARKET HRT-- HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY.
I'D BEEN SYNTHESIZING MY OWN WITH THE LAB'S EQUIPMENT. IT WAS CHEAP TO PRODUCE, AND EVEN WITH THE KINGPIN'S MARKUP, IT'D BE CHEAPER AND EASIER THAN GOING THROUGH THE SYSTEM.
OUT OF ALL THE WAYS I COULD HAVE SUGGESTED GROWING THE BUSINESS, IT FELT THE LEAST... COMPROMISING. IT COULD ACTUALLY HELP PEOPLE.
MAYBE THAT'D MAKE UP FOR GLOWBOY.
THE SUGGESTION LANDED WELL. TURK PASSED ON A GLOWING COMPLIMENT.
I FELT STABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE I'D LANDED IN NEW YORK.
PA
AND THEN.

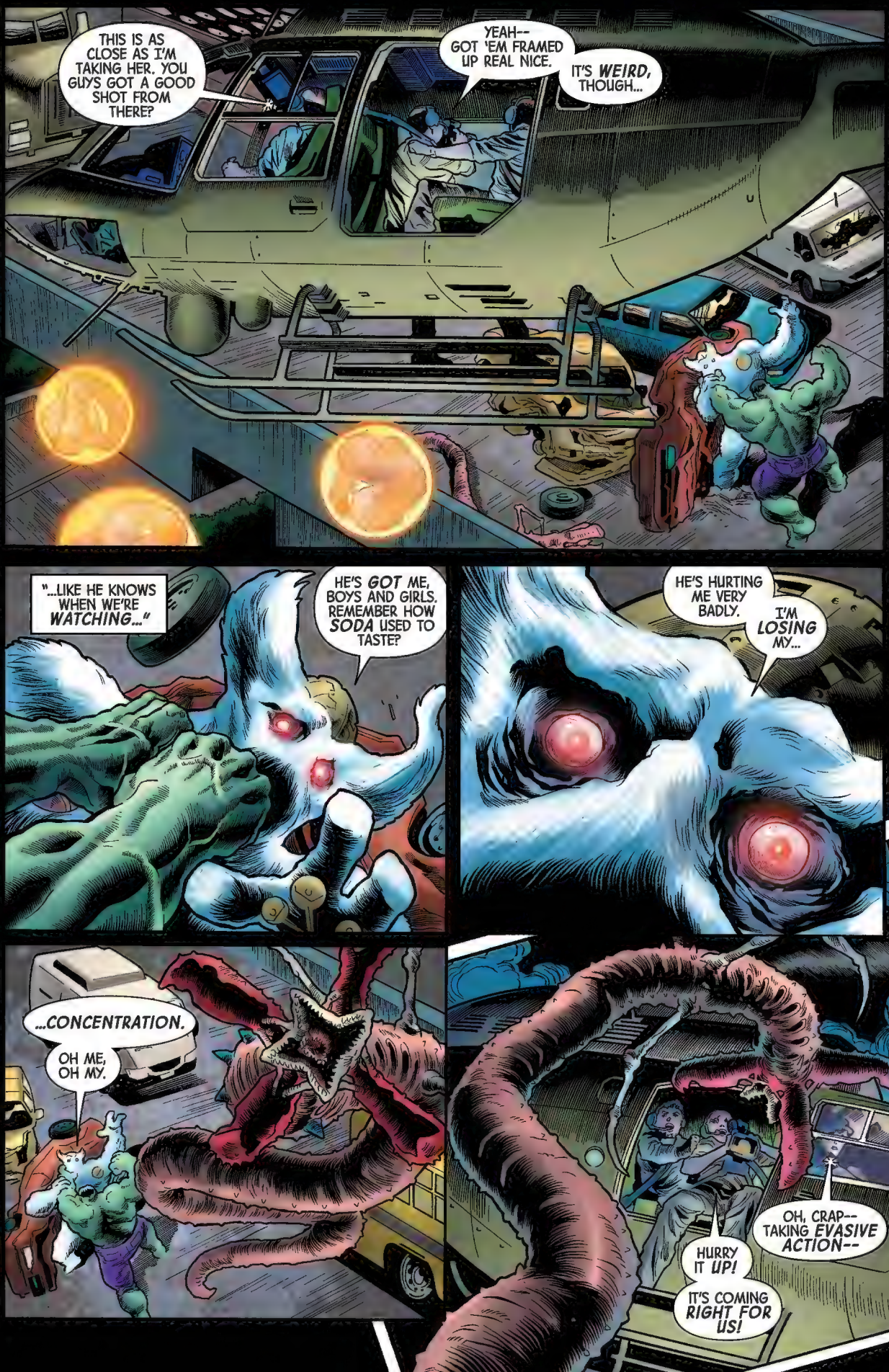
THE GROUND SHIFTED.
BRAKKA
BRAK
KA
BRA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
I REMEMBER IT SO *CLEARLY*. EVERY THOUGHT THAT CROSSED MY MIND.
*STUPID* THINGS, IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES.
PAK
PAK
PAK
I REMEMBER THINKING I'D NEVER SEEN A *SUPER HERO* SO CLOSE.
I REMEMBER THINKING...

STUPID.

SHADOW BASE SITE G.
THE HULK ISN'T A SUPER HERO. NOT TO MOST. I KNOW WHEN I FIRST SAW HIM...IN THE FLESH, NOT ON A SCREEN OR IN A JAR...I WAS TERRIFIED.
HE HAD EVERY REASON TO KILL ME. BUT HE JUST LOOKED AT ME...AND I LOOKED BACK.
I LOOKED HIM IN THE EYE...
...AND ALL I SAW IN HIS EYES WAS RAGE.
A COLD, HARD FURY, CUTTING THROUGH ME LIKE...LIKE A HIGH WIND.
SO.
YOU WITH ME, McGOWAN?
NO. NOT LIKE WIND.
IT WAS LIKE A MIRROR.
--CONTINUING COVERAGE OF THE HULK-RELATED ATTACK ON PHOENIX--WHERE IT LOOKS LIKE A STRANGE, WHITE-FURRED ALIEN HAS, AH--
ATTACK ON PHOENIX
--SAVED THE DAY?

YES. XEMNU SAVES THE DAY.
YOU ALL KNOW ME, DON'T YOU, BOYS AND GIRLS? XEMNU, FROM THE MAGIC PLANET? REMEMBER?
BEFORE THE JOB AND THE FAMILY YOU HATE. BEFORE EVERYTHING GOT SO HARD.
REMEMBER SATURDAY MORNING TELEVISION? THE SMELL OF A NEW PLASTIC TOY? REMEMBER BEING HAPPY?
THEN YOU REMEMBER ME.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, HULK? DO YOU REMEMBER ME?
I WAS THE HULK BEFORE YOU...
HULK IS HULK! YOU ARE WHITE-THING!
AND HULK KNOW YOU. YOU HURT HULK. HULK SMASHED YOU--BUT YOU CAME BACK.
ALWAYS COMING BACK. ALWAYS AND ALWAYS.
ALWAYS TRY TO HURT HULK MORE--

--SO THIS TIME HULK HURT YOU!
HURT YOU FIRST!
OH ME.
OH MY.
BANNER SEEMS TO BE ATTACKING THE ALIEN HERO--IT'S HARD TO SAY WHY, EXACTLY--
--UNLESS THE ALIEN IS PERHAPS FOILING SOME SCHEME OF BANNER'S--
PERFECT. ISN'T HE PERFECT, TRAVERS?
SUCH A CONSUMMATE SHOWMAN.


THIS IS AS CLOSE AS I'M TAKING HER. YOU GUYS GOT A GOOD SHOT FROM THERE?
YEAH-- GOT 'EM FRAMED UP REAL NICE.
IT'S WEIRD, THOUGH...
"...LIKE HE KNOWS WHEN WE'RE WATCHING..."
HE'S GOT ME, BOYS AND GIRLS. REMEMBER HOW SODA USED TO TASTE?
HE'S HURTING ME VERY BADLY.
I'M LOSING MY...
...CONCENTRATION.
OH ME, OH MY.
OH, CRAP-- TAKING EVASIVE ACTION--
HURRY IT UP!
IT'S COMING RIGHT FOR US!

IT'S GONNA KILL US-- IT'S--
LORD IN HEAVEN.
SHRIEEE!
IT'S AN ANGEL... IT'S AN...
LAND. OR DIE. NOW!
--AAAHH!
YOU KNOW, I TAKE IT BACK. THEY'RE ALL PERFECT.
EACH IN THEIR OWN SPECIAL, SPECIAL WAY.

SHUT UP, WHITE-THING! SHUT UP!
EWOKS AND BUBBLEGUM. SEVENTH-GRADE CRUSHES AND LONG SUMMER EVENINGS.
WASN'T EVERYTHING SO MUCH BETTER?
SHUT UP! HULK DOES NOT CARE! HULK DOES NOT CARE ABOUT WAS!
HULK IS!
HULK IS HULK!
PPOP
OH DEAR, OH DEAR.
HE'S GOING TO KILL ME.
REMEMBER YOUR FIRST LOVE?
MTN REMEMBER XEMNU?
RICK, YOU-- YOU NEED TO STOP HIM. IF XEMNU LOSES CONTROL OVER THOSE PARASITES...
ALL I CAN DO IS FEED THE BIG GUY MORE GAMMA, JACKIE. THAT WON'T CALM HIM DOWN--I KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE.
LET'S SEE HOW THIS PLAYS OUT...
"WE GOT AN EYE ON HIM?"

INDEED WE DO, MR. CREEL--SWINGING AROUND TO FACE HIM NOW. GAMMA FLIGHT'S READY TO EARN OUR PAY.
REMEMBER-- CONCENTRATE. DON'T JUST ABSORB THE HULL.
ABSORB THE ENGINES.
HA. KNOW WHAT I LIKE BEST ABOUT THESE POWERS OF MINE?
I GOT 'EM OFF A TRICKSTER GOD.
SO IT AIN'T LIKE THERE'S RULES, EXACTLY. AND SOME DAYS...
...SOME DAYS THERE AIN'T EVEN GUIDELINES.
HULK NOT STUPID, WHITE-THING. HULK KNOWS WHAT YOU ARE. HULK KNOWS WHAT YOU DO!
SO HULK WILL TEAR YOU APART BEFORE YOU DO IT--
EH?

HOLY CRAP.
"XEMNU FROM THE MAGIC PLANET"? I WATCHED YOU WHEN I WAS A KID.
DIDN'T I?
RRAAARHH!
OH ME, OH MY, MR. CARL CREEL. YOU SAVED MY LIFE.
YOU KNOW ME, DON'T YOU? DON'T YOU REMEMBER?
STUPID METAL MAN-- WHITE-THING LIES! WHITE-THING ALWAYS LIES!
WHITE-THING IS A LIE!
WHY DO PUNY HUMANS NEVER LISTEN TO
HE VANISHED...?
TRANSLOCATED, MURRAY. WE CAN GO PRETTY MUCH ANYWHERE THESE DAYS. AND COMING BACK'S EVEN EASIER.

"I'M GUESSING SOMEONE BACK HOME DECIDED ENOUGH WAS TOO MUCH..."
ALL RIGHT, BIG GUY.
YOU'VE DONE ENOUGH DAMAGE.
SCIENCE WOMAN!
SCIENCE WOMAN TOOK HULK AWAY WITH BIG MACHINE? BACK TO STUPID METAL HOUSE?
WHY?

HULK WOULD HAVE SMASHED THEM!
WHITE-THING MOST OF ALL!
YOU MEAN THE HERO WHO JUST SAVED PHOENIX? ON LIVE TV?
DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO TURN ON YOU?
BAH! PUNY HUMANS ALWAYS TURN ON HULK. WHITE-THING MORE IMPORTANT!
WHITE-THING MUST BE SMASHED-- OR--OR HE WILL--
HE'LL WHAT? SAVE MORE LIVES?
ALL I SAW "WHITE-THING" DO WAS CLEAN UP A DISASTER YOU CAUSED--
NO!
WHITE-THING WAS...DOING SOMETHING. HULK FELT IT.
HULK NOT KNOW WHAT IT WAS--BUT HULK NOT LIKE IT--
STOP. YOU'RE JUST...WHAT YOU'RE SAYING ISN'T MAKING ANY SENSE...I...
I THINK I NEED TO TALK TO ONE OF THE OTHERS. CAN YOU DO THAT FOR ME, BIG GUY?
JUST--GO BACK IN FOR A WHILE--
HULK.

HULK IS HULK. NOT "BIG GUY."
HULK... IS HULK.
WHAT IS WHAT?
I TOLD YOU--YOU'RE NOT MAKING SENSE.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
HULK...
HULK... HULK IS...
HULK WILL...
HULK WILL GO.
RRRHH.
THAT WAS WEIRD. HE'S NEVER KEPT ME AWAY BEFORE.
AND WHEN WE GOT HURT-- HE TOOK OVER LIKE I WAS NOTHING.
BEFORE THE SUN SETS, HE'S... STRONGER THAN ME.
THAT'S A WRINKLE.

LOOK--I NEED TO BRING THE REST BACK TOO. IF THE MEDIA GETS HOLD OF THEM, THEY'LL EAT THEM ALIVE--ESPECIALLY LEN. YOU KNOW WHAT HE'S LIKE.
WE CAN START WITH HIM, IF YOU LIKE. HE KNOWS ALL OF YOU--HE COULD PROBABLY GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS--
HNH. FIRST LIE YOU'VE EVER TOLD ME.
SAMSON COULDN'T GET TO THE BOTTOM OF A BAG OF CHIPS, AND YOU KNOW IT.
THAT'S NOT FAIR--
AND THERE'S LIE NUMBER TWO.
KEEP DIGGING, McGOWAN.
SOMEONE NEEDS TO LOOK INTO IT, THOUGH--SOMEONE COMPETENT.
I MEAN...YOU KNOW HOW THE BIG GUY TALKS, BABY TALK. HE'S JUST A KID.
BUT THIS... THIS WAS WEIRD EVEN FOR HIM, RIGHT?
I...I JUST COULDN'T MAKE OUT WHAT HE MEANT.
HE KEPT REPEATING THIS--THIS WORD--
YEAH. OVER AND OVER.
"HULK." "HULK."

WHAT THE HELL IS A HULK?
HE LOOKS ME RIGHT IN THE EYE. AND HIS EYE IS A MIRROR.
BECAUSE I'VE BEEN ANGRY. I'VE BEEN OUT OF CONTROL. I'VE WANTED TO END THE WORLD THE WAY IT IS AND BRING ON SOMETHING BETTER.
HAVEN'T YOU?
BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT I SEE IN THE MIRROR THIS TIME.
I LOOK THE DEVIL IN THE EYE...AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE LOOKS LIKE HE MIGHT BE SCARED.
MTN
HULK SAVES THE DAY
AND NOW I'M SCARED TOO.
BECAUSE SUDDENLY... I REMEMBER EXACTLY WHO THE HULK IS.

AND THE GROUND SHIFTS UNDER MY FEET.
JUST LIKE *LAST* TIME.
BRAKKA
BRAK
KA
BRA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
I REMEMBER IT SO *CLEARLY*. EVERY THOUGHT THAT CROSSED MY MIND.
*STUPID* THINGS, IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES.
I REMEMBER THINKING I'D NEVER SEEN A *SUPER HERO* SO CLOSE.
I REMEMBER THINKING...

REMEMBER?

FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
THIS NOTE IS LEGAL TENDER
FOR ALL DEBTS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE
TIH 62K7U4
WASHINGTON, D.C.
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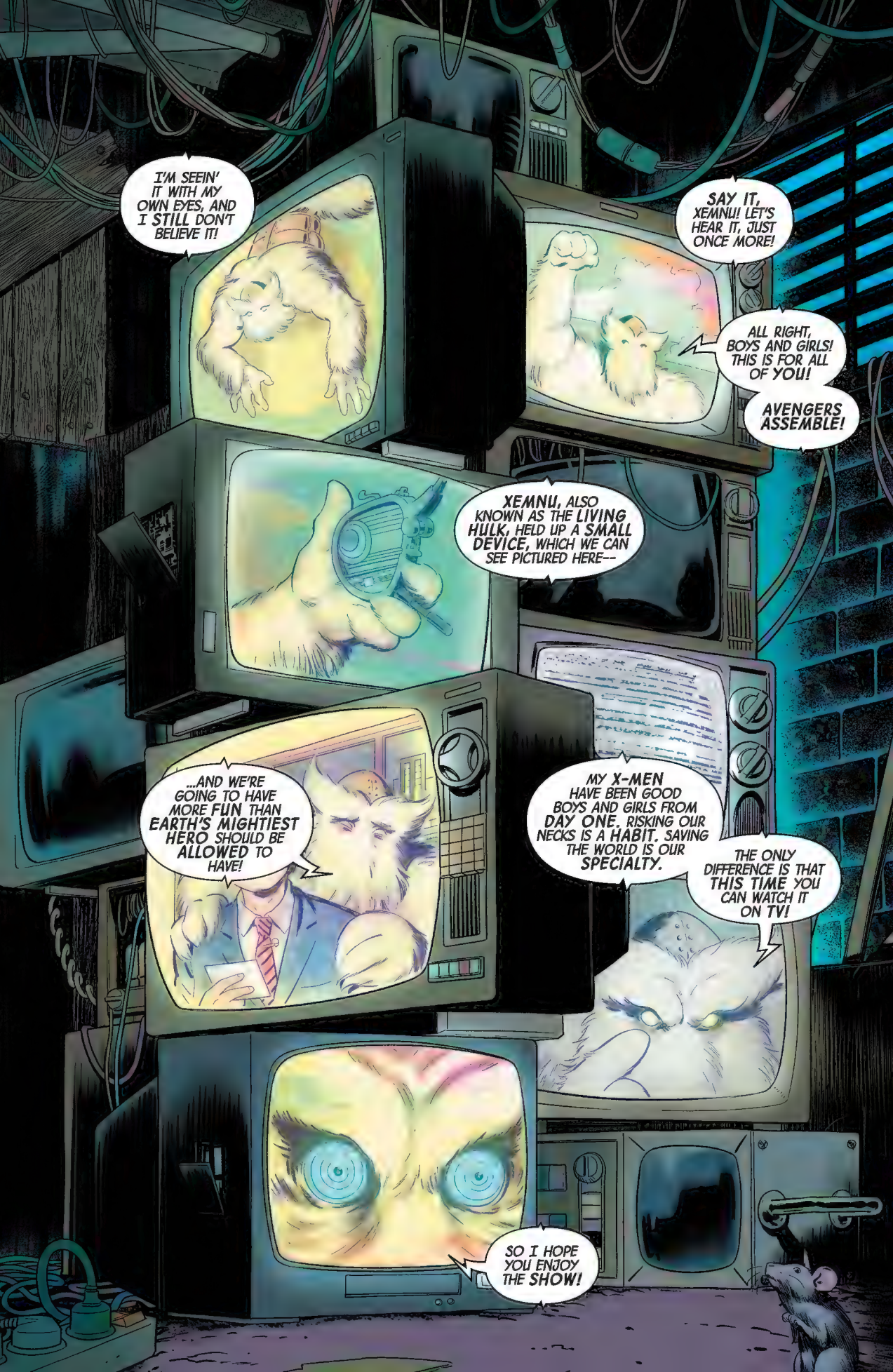
ONE

“And from this mind I will not flee,
but to you all that misjudge me,
I do protest as ye may see,
that I am as I am and so will I be.”

– Sir Thomas Wyatt
“I am as I am”


I'M SEEIN' IT WITH MY OWN EYES, AND I STILL DON'T BELIEVE IT!
SAY IT, XEMNU! LET'S HEAR IT, JUST ONCE MORE!
ALL RIGHT, BOYS AND GIRLS! THIS IS FOR ALL OF YOU!
AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!
XEMNU, ALSO KNOWN AS THE LIVING HULK, HELD UP A SMALL DEVICE, WHICH WE CAN SEE PICTURED HERE--
...AND WE'RE GOING TO HAVE MORE FUN THAN EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HERO SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO HAVE!
MY X-MEN HAVE BEEN GOOD BOYS AND GIRLS FROM DAY ONE. RISKING OUR NECKS IS A HABIT. SAVING THE WORLD IS OUR SPECIALTY.
THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT THIS TIME YOU CAN WATCH IT ON TV!
SO I HOPE YOU ENJOY THE SHOW!

SURE. THE HULK, I KNOW THAT GUY.
XEMNU FROM THE MAGIC PLANET SHOW, RIGHT?
LOOK, I'M FROM JERSEY, AND XEMNU'S OUR HERO. ONE TIME I ACTUALLY SAW HIM, UH--AW MAN, WHAT'S HE CALL IT--
--EMBIGGEN. I SAW HIM EMBIGGEN.
XEMNU'S THE BEST.
IT IS SO IMPORTANT WHAT XEMNU'S SAYING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT. IT'S ALL OUR RESPONSIBILITY.
WHAT'S THAT SLOGAN? "I BELIEVE IN THE INCREDIBLE HULK"?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO THE HERALD. WE'VE...WE LOST SO MANY.
IT'S HARD TO GET MY HEAD AROUND.
XEMNU WAS MY FAVORITE WHEN I WAS A KID. AND NOW MY KID'S A FAN TOO.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, SWEETPEA?
YOU'RE ON XEM-NU'S...MAGIC PLA-NET...
BUT THE THING IS...XEMNU'S ALSO RIGHT THAT WE CAN'T LISTEN TO THE ALARMISTS ON THIS. WE HAVE TO MOVE SLOWLY.
I MEAN, HOW DO WE PAY FOR IT ALL?

SO I COME DOWN VERY HARD ON PUPILS GOING ON STRIKE.
LIVING HULK SAVES PHOENIX
INTERESTING. I WASN'T EXPECTING YOU TO BE QUITE THIS POWERFUL...
MY POWERS ONLY GROW STRONGER. YES.
BUT STRONGEST IN A CONTEXT. THROUGH A SCREEN. THROUGH A CULTURE.
"TELE-VISION."
AND THERE ARE SO MANY LITTLE TELEVISIONS NOW. MILLIONS AND BILLIONS.
TELEVISION IN YOUR HOME, TELEVISION ON YOUR PHONE, TELEVISION BY YOUR BED...
TELEVISION IN YOUR HEAD.
DON'T YOU REMEMBER?

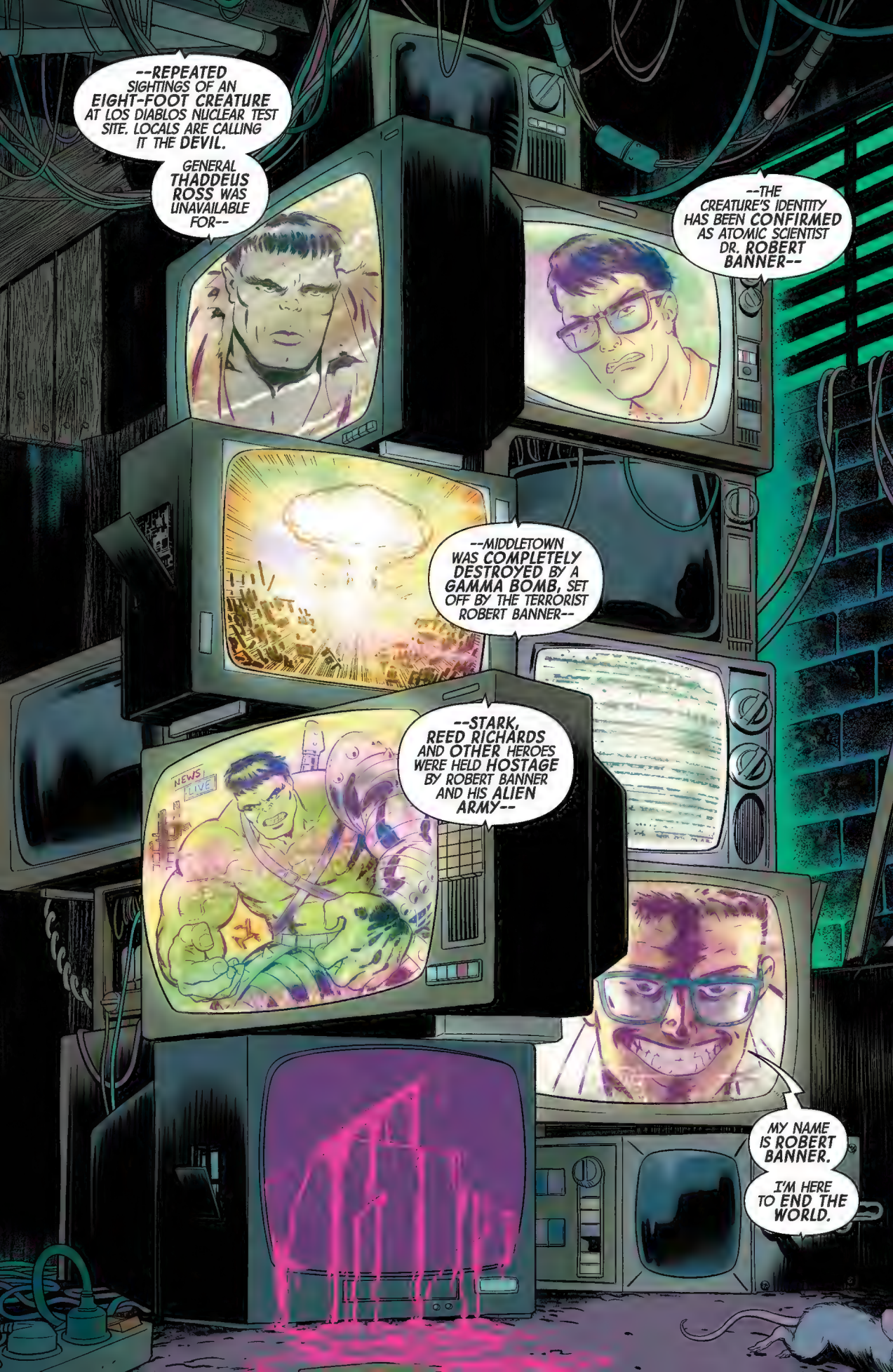
WHILE I HID, AND LICKED MY WOUNDS, AND LEARNED TO SEEM HARMLESS...THIS BECAME MY PLANET.
XEMNU'S MAGIC PLANET.
"PLANET HULK."
IT WON'T WORK ON ME, OF COURSE. MY MIND IS SHIELDED.
AND I'M DARIO AGGER. I OF ALL PEOPLE KNOW HOW THE SAUSAGE IS MADE.
I MENTION THAT IN CASE YOUR EYES ARE GETTING BIGGER THAN YOUR STOMACH...
OUR DEAL IS ACCEPTABLE TO ME.
ONCE YOU ARE DONE WITH THIS WORLD--WHEN IT IS A DYING SHELL--IT WILL BE LIKE MY HOME.
I WILL CONVERT THOSE HUMANS WHO SURVIVE TO BE AS I AM...
WHOEVER'S LEFT. AND YOU SHOULD CHARGE, FRANKLY.
YOU'RE NOT A CHARITY...
YES. REPAIRING MY PHYSICAL FORM WAS NOT WITHOUT COST. SUSTENANCE IS REQUIRED.
I AM VEWY HUNGWY.

OF COURSE. TRAVERS? GET XEMNU A MEAL.
IT'LL TAKE A LITTLE TIME TO SOURCE, SIR, WHAT WITH ALL THE, AH... DISAPPEARANCES LATELY...
GIVE ME AN HOUR, THOUGH-- I'LL FIND SOMEONE WHO WON'T BE MISSED.
THAT'S A VERY REASONABLE TIME FRAME, TRAVERS.
XEMNU?
I'M HUNGWY NOW.
SORRY, TRAVERS.
WHAT?
SIR, YOU CAN'T--I'VE SERVED YOU FOR YEARS--
I'VE NEVER QUESTIONED-- I'VE--I'VE KILLED FOR YOU--
MR. AGGER, PLEASE--
IT'S UNFORTUNATE, I KNOW.
BUT THE THING IS, TRAVERS...I CAN ALWAYS HIRE ANOTHER KILLER.

I'VE ONLY GOT ACCESS TO THE ONE HULK.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND, OLD FRIEND.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND.


--REPEATED SIGHTINGS OF AN EIGHT-FOOT CREATURE AT LOS DIABLOS NUCLEAR TEST SITE. LOCALS ARE CALLING IT THE DEVIL.
GENERAL THADDEUS ROSS WAS UNAVAILABLE FOR--
--THE CREATURE'S IDENTITY HAS BEEN CONFIRMED AS ATOMIC SCIENTIST DR. ROBERT BANNER--
--MIDDLETOWN WAS COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY A GAMMA BOMB, SET OFF BY THE TERRORIST ROBERT BANNER--
--STARK, REED RICHARDS AND OTHER HEROES WERE HELD HOSTAGE BY ROBERT BANNER AND HIS ALIEN ARMY--
NEWS LIVE
MY NAME IS ROBERT BANNER.
I'M HERE TO END THE WORLD.

SURE. ROBERT BANNER. I KNOW THAT GUY.
WHAT DO THEY CALL HIM? "THE STRANGEST MAN OF ALL TIME"?
LOUSY TERRORIST.
HE'S TERRIFYING. HE'S LIKE A CULT LEADER. ALL THE WEIRDOS IN MY SCHOOL STARTED WEARING THESE CREEPY MASKS...
I'M JUST GLAD THE INCREDIBLE HULK ALWAYS MANAGED TO STOP HIM.
YEAH, MY THEORY WAS ALWAYS THAT THE MONSTER DIDN'T WANT TO KILL. THAT'S WHY HIS BODY COUNT'S SO LOW.
BUT ROBERT BANNER IS ALWAYS IN THE BACKGROUND... PUSHING HIM ON...
I THINK THAT'S HOW THAT WENT.
ROBERT BANNER DESTROYED MY CHILDHOOD HOME. HE ALL BUT KILLED MY FATHER. HE'S NEVER APOLOGIZED.
BUT THE HULK SAVED MY LIFE. IT'S HARD TO RECONCILE THAT... SOMETIMES...
WAIT...WHY IS IT HARD TO...? THEY'RE DIFFERENT PEOPLE...
AREN'T THEY...?
I THINK I GOT A CONCUSSION BACK THERE...OR SOMETHING... SOMETHING'S WRONG...
NOTHING IS WRONG.
NOTHING IS WRONG.
NOTHING IS WRONG.

SHADOW BASE SITE G.
NOTHING IS WRONG.
BRUCE?
NOTHING.
THEY'RE SAYING SOME WILD STUFF ABOUT YOU ON THE TV, MAN--
HEY, YOU ALL RIGHT IN HERE?
I'M FINE. NOTHING'S WRONG.
THE MIRROR... IT'S HOLDING, RICK. IT'S HOLDING.
HE'S NOT COMING OUT.

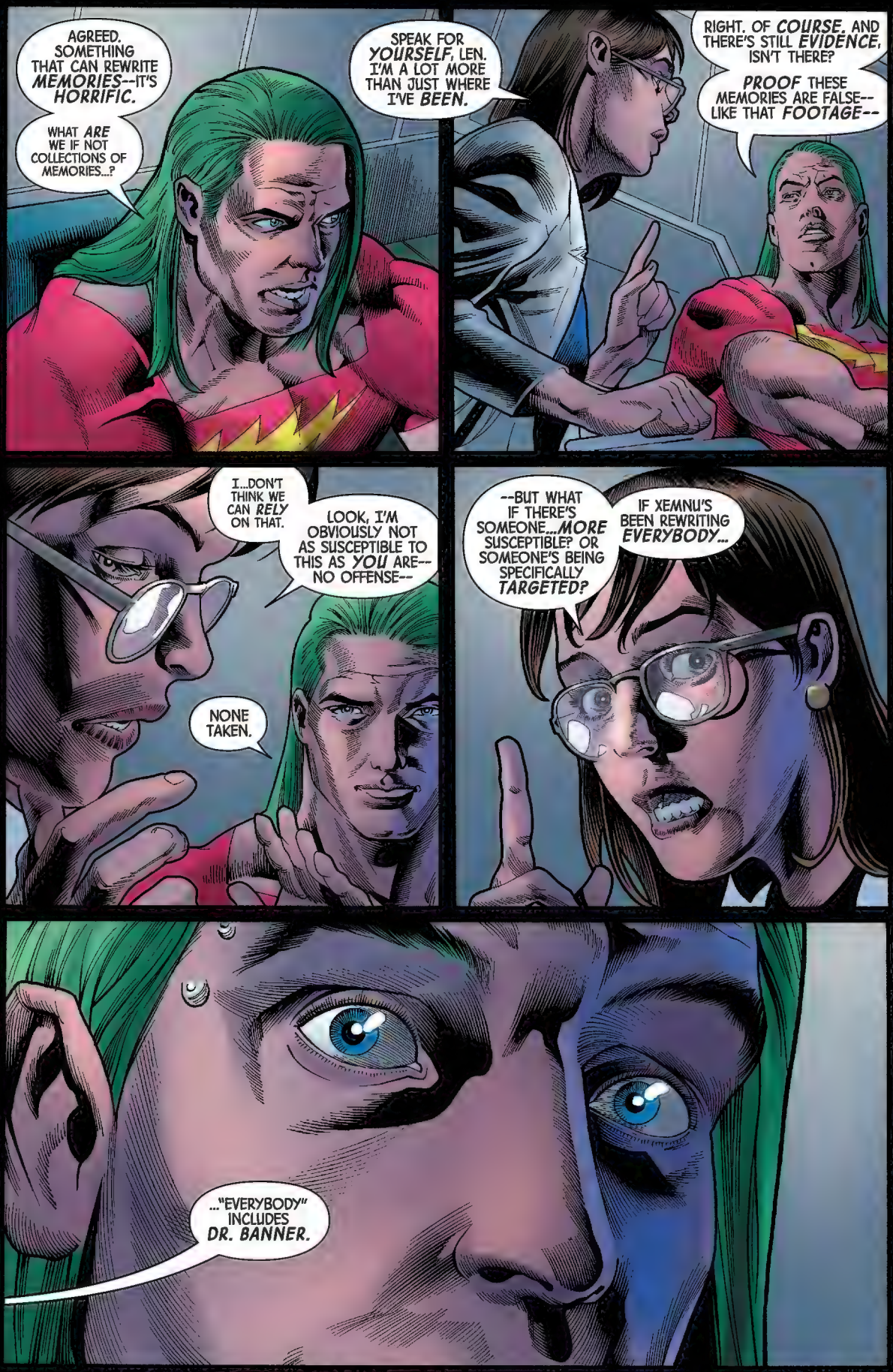
OH-KAY.
SO...WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN HERE?
...PLANNING THE NEXT MOVE. WE'VE BEEN CONCENTRATING FAR TOO HARD ON ROXXON.
THESE STRATEGIC STRIKES...PROTESTS, NONLETHAL ATTACKS... RESPONDING TO DISTRESS CALLS, FOR GOD'S SAKE...
...THEY WON'T MAKE THE NECESSARY IMPACT.
WE NEED TO STRIKE HARDER. HIT THE HUMANS WHERE IT HURTS--HIT SOME SOFT TARGETS.
MAKE THE PUNY HUMANS AFRAID AGAIN...
THAT...DOESN'T SOUND LIKE YOU, BRUCE...
WHY ARE YOU CALLING ME THAT, RICK?
BRUCE IS MY MIDDLE NAME. YOU KNOW THAT.
I'M ROBERT. ROBERT BANNER.
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO?

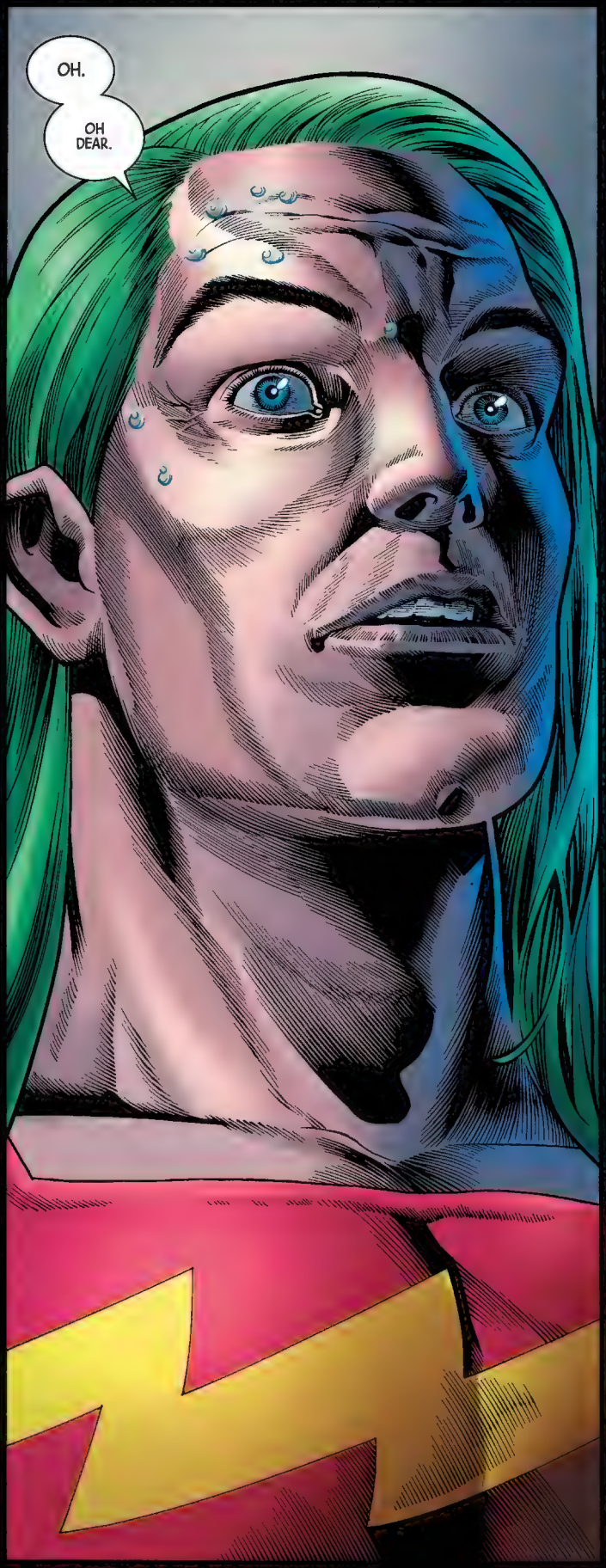
HEY, LEN. CAN WE *TALK?* MIND IF I COME IN?
OH, HI, CHARLENE. NO, I WASN'T DOING ANYTHING--JUST CATCHING UP ON SOME READING.
GREAT. *LISTEN*--CAN YOU DO ME A FAVOR AND LOOK AT *THIS?*
IT'S *VIDEO FOOTAGE* OF ME-- PART OF THE ARCHIVE DATA. I'VE ISOLATED ONE SENTENCE IN *PARTICULAR.*
NO *CONTEXT*-- JUST LISTEN TO IT AND TELL ME WHAT *NAME* YOU HEAR.
WHAT IS THIS, A *HEARING* TEST? CHECKING FOR AFTEREFFECTS OF TRANSLOCATION?
SURE. WHATEVER. JUST...*LISTEN* AND *REPEAT.*
--NO OUT. THEN *DAREDEVIL* HAPPENED, AND I WENT TO--
*"DAREDEVIL."*
HOW WAS THAT?
...
THANKS. I WAS WORRIED I WAS *HALLUCINATING.*
THIS MIGHT BE *WORSE.*

YOU HEARD SOMETHING ELSE?
NO, I HEARD "DAREDEVIL." I JUST DON'T REMEMBER SAYING DAREDEVIL. I DON'T REMEMBER DAREDEVIL.
I REMEMBER XEMNU.
XEMNU...FROM THE TV SHOW? "THE MAGIC PLANET"?
DID YOU EVER WATCH THAT SHOW?
I... I THINK SO...?
YEAH, I DON'T KNOW EITHER.
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE MANDELA EFFECT IS, LEN?
OF COURSE. I'VE STUDIED IT.
IT'S A TERM FOR FALSE MEMORIES THAT FIND THEIR WAY INTO THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS.
NAMED FOR NELSON MANDELA. A NUMBER OF PEOPLE REMEMBERED HIS FUNERAL HAPPENING IN THE EIGHTIES--LONG BEFORE HE DIED.
SIMILARLY, THAT MOVIE ABOUT THE GENIE--NEVER EXISTED.
NEITHER DID "JIFFY" PEANUT BUTTER..."MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL"...
..."THE MAGIC PLANET." A SHOW EVERYONE REMEMBERS, BUT NOBODY WATCHED.
IT NEVER EXISTED, LEN.
IT'S ALL IN OUR HEADS.

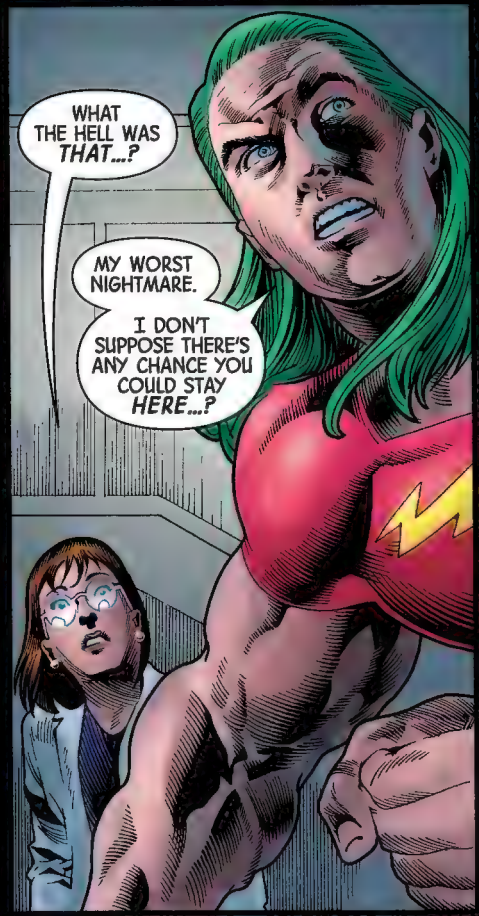
HELLO.
HELLO, BOYS AND GIRLS.
I'M IN YOUR HEAD.

LEN... UM...
...YOU KNOW I'M TRANS, RIGHT?
UH, YES. I MEAN, I DIDN'T KNOW EXACTLY, BUT...
...WELL, I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS MY BUSINESS.
YEAH. I DON'T REALLY BRING THIS UP WITH PEOPLE I DON'T KNOW WELL.
BUT FOR ME, THE REALIZATION OF THAT...IT WAS THE START OF THIS LONG PROCESS OF... SELF-EXAMINATION, I GUESS.
OR SELF-DISCOVERY. I SPENT A LOT OF TIME WORKING OUT WHAT WAS ME, AND WHAT WASN'T.
WHAT WAS A STORY TOLD ABOUT ME, TO ME, BY THE WORLD.
AND NOW, THIS... THING...THIS MONSTER FROM THE MAGIC PLANET, THIS HULK...
...IT CAN LOOK AT ME, THROUGH A SCREEN...IT CAN FORCE ITS OWN NARRATIVES ONTO ME, EVEN INTO MY HEAD...AND...
...AND I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THAT.
WHO I AM BELONGS TO ME.


AGREED. SOMETHING THAT CAN REWRITE MEMORIES--IT'S HORRIFIC.
WHAT ARE WE IF NOT COLLECTIONS OF MEMORIES...?
SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, LEN. I'M A LOT MORE THAN JUST WHERE I'VE BEEN.
RIGHT. OF COURSE. AND THERE'S STILL EVIDENCE, ISN'T THERE?
PROOF THESE MEMORIES ARE FALSE--LIKE THAT FOOTAGE--
I...DON'T THINK WE CAN RELY ON THAT.
LOOK, I'M OBVIOUSLY NOT AS SUSCEPTIBLE TO THIS AS YOU ARE--NO OFFENSE--
NONE TAKEN.
--BUT WHAT IF THERE'S SOMEONE...MORE SUSCEPTIBLE? OR SOMEONE'S BEING SPECIFICALLY TARGETED?
IF XEMNU'S BEEN REWRITING EVERYBODY...
..."EVERYBODY" INCLUDES DR. BANNER.


OH.
OH DEAR.

KR
RI
I
SS
SH


WHAT THE HELL WAS *THAT...?*
MY WORST NIGHTMARE.
I DON'T SUPPOSE THERE'S ANY CHANCE YOU COULD STAY *HERE...?*

RICK-- WE HEARD BREAKING GLASS.
WHAT HAPPENED...?
TAKE A LOOK FOR YOURSELF.
MID-CONVERSATION, HE JUST TURNS TO THE MIRROR AND...WELL.
BANNER SMASH.
DON'T FUSS, ALL OF YOU. THE SIMPLEMINDED BRUTE WAS BECOMING A DISTRACTION. THE DISTRACTION IS NOW REMOVED.
YOU KNOW HOW IT IS, YOU UNDERSTAND. IT'S RATIONAL.
I'D HATE FOR YOU NOT TO BE RATIONAL ABOUT THIS...

INSIDE.
STUPID!
STUPID BANNER!
WHITE-THING IS IN STUPID BANNER'S HEAD! IN EVERYONE'S HEAD!
EVERYONE BUT HULK!
BECAUSE HULK IS HULK!
SO LET HULK OUT, BANNER!
LET HULK OUT--
YOU WON'T DO IT THAT WAY.
XEMNU'S REWRITTEN HIM. THAT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU CAN PUNCH.
IT'S STRONGER THAN YOU ARE.
...WHO...?
BUT NOT STRONGER THAN WE ARE.
AFTER ALL... I'M THE STRONGEST ONE THERE IS.

REMEMBER?
HULK IS HULK

33

“I WOULD RATHER BE A DEVIL IN ALLIANCE WITH TRUTH, THAN AN ANGEL IN ALLIANCE WITH FALSEHOOD.”

– LUDWIG FEUERBACH
*THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY*

ROBERT BANNER.
THAT'S MY NAME. THAT WAS ALWAYS MY NAME.
THE NAME OF THE MAN WHO ENDS THE WORLD.
I KNOW I SHOULDN'T WANT THAT. OR I SHOULD WANT IT IN A... METAPHORICAL SENSE.
TO END THE WORLD AS IT CURRENTLY IS...THE POWER STRUCTURES, THE INJUSTICES. NOT THE PUNY HUMANS THEMSELVES.
BUT ALL I CAN REMEMBER... IS WANTING THE OTHER THING.
WANTING, AND NOT DOING.
HAVE I BEEN LIMITING MYSELF ALL THESE YEARS? LIMITING MY TRUE POTENTIAL?
WHAT WOULD HAPPEN, I WONDER?

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I LET *GO?*

DR. BANNER... LISTEN TO ME. PLEASE.
YOU'VE BEEN INFECTED BY SOMETHING. I THINK WE ALL HAVE.
SOMETHING THAT ALTERS MEMORIES.
SOME... ALIEN PRESENCE... IS CREATING SOCIETAL GROUP MEMORIES AS A FORM OF CAMOUFLAGE.
IT DISGUISES ITSELF AS SOMETHING WE'LL ACCEPT-- SOMETHING WE'LL TRUST, OR DEFER TO. SOMETHING SAFE.
A TV SHOW FROM CHILDHOOD.
A SUPER HERO.
IT CAME WITH A ROXXON ATTACK. I THINK IT MIGHT HAVE MADE SOME KIND OF DEAL WITH THEM...
SO...YOU'RE SAYING MY MEMORIES AREN'T REAL...
THAT'S OUR BEST GUESS. BUT FOR WHATEVER REASON, YOU'RE NOT ACTING LIKE YOURSELF.
YOU DO SEE THAT, BOB?

HMH.
LEONARD... I HAVE A VERY CLEAR MEMORY...
...OF THE SOUND MY FATHER'S SKULL MADE WHEN IT BROKE ON MY MOTHER'S TOMBSTONE.
I KILLED HIM.
AND IT WAS NO ACCIDENT.
"IT WAS...
"...PRECISELY...
"...WHAT I WANTED."
REBECCA
IS THAT A FALSE MEMORY TOO?
WAS I NOT ACTING LIKE MY TRUE SELF IN THAT MOMENT?
SOMETIMES IT GETS DARK IN HERE, LEONARD.
DARK AND STRANGE...

STRANGE.

HULK *REMEMBER* THIS PLACE...OR PLACE *LIKE* THIS...

...BUT IS *STRANGE* NOW.

COGS AND GEARS AND *JUNK*. FACES LOOKING *BACK* AT HULK.

WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE?

YOU DON'T *REMEMBER?*

YOU SPENT A LOT OF *TIME* HERE, BACK IN THE DAY. BANNER'S *INNER WORLD*--HIS *MINDSCAPE*.

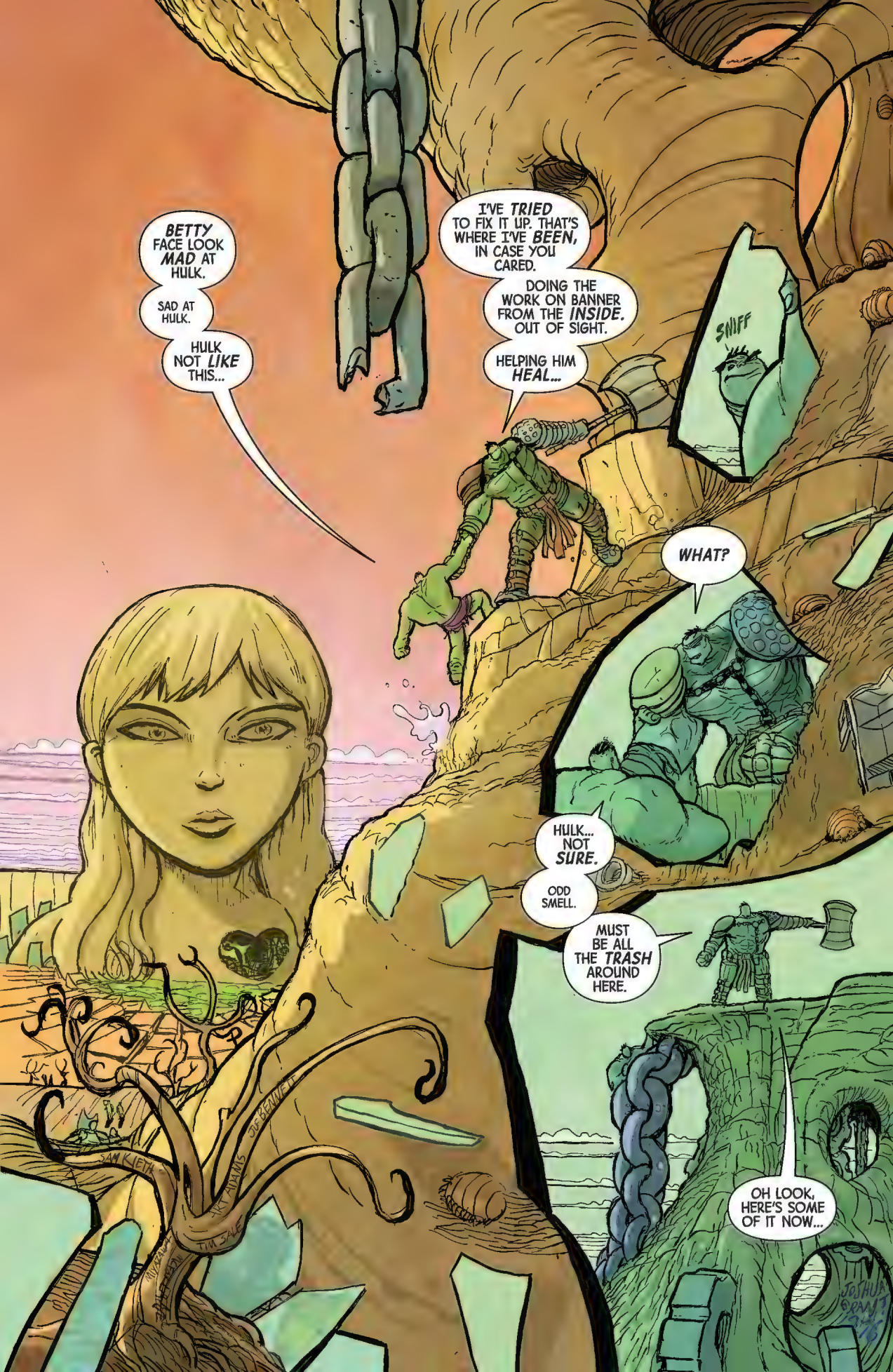
IT'S...GONE *DOWNHILL* SINCE THEN.

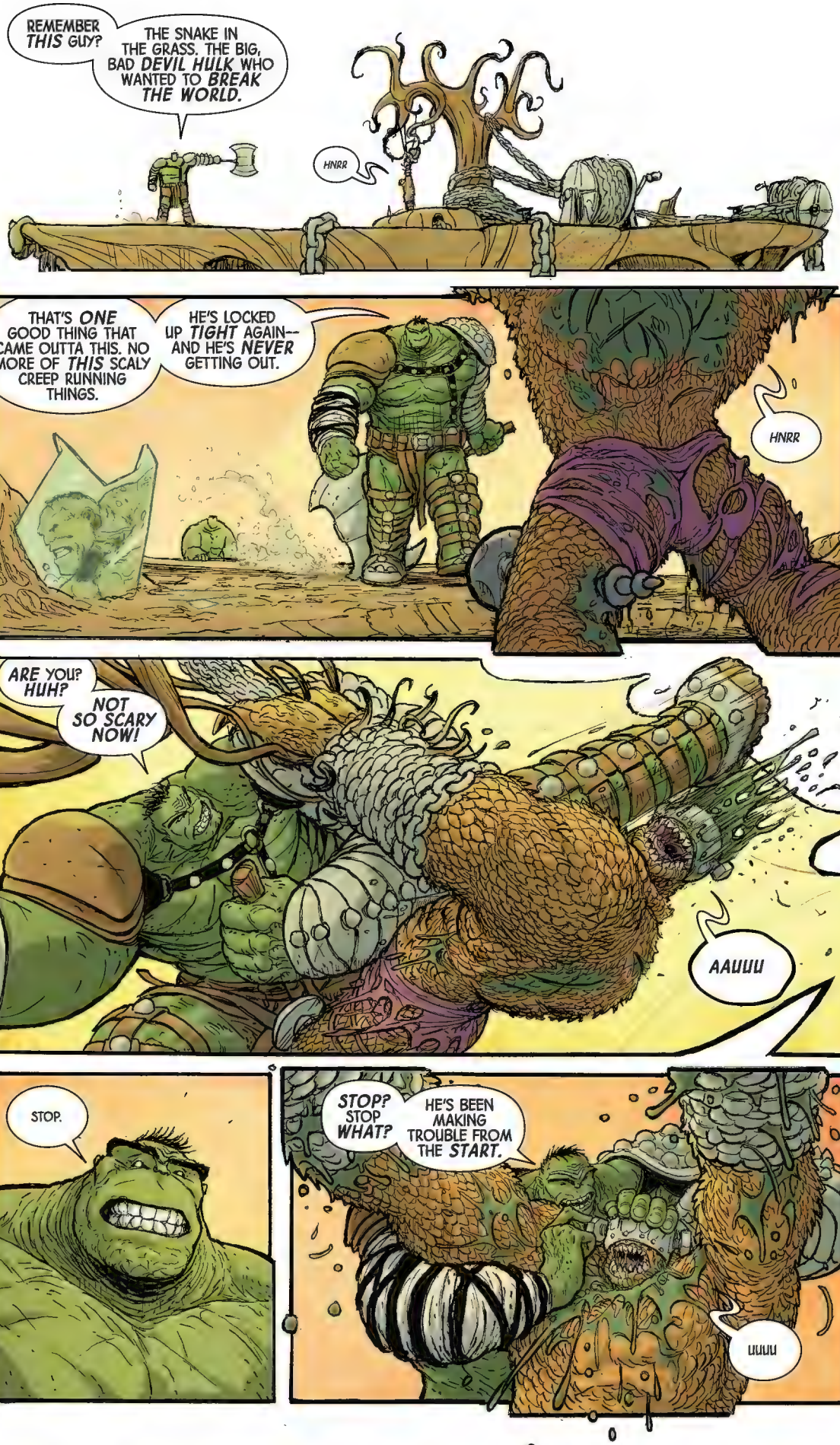
IN SKY... EVERYONE HULK *HATES*. BUT NOT... *REAL*...

WHAT IS THAT?

MEMORIES? ANXIETIES? IT'S *YOUR* MIND, HULK. YOU SHOULD KNOW.

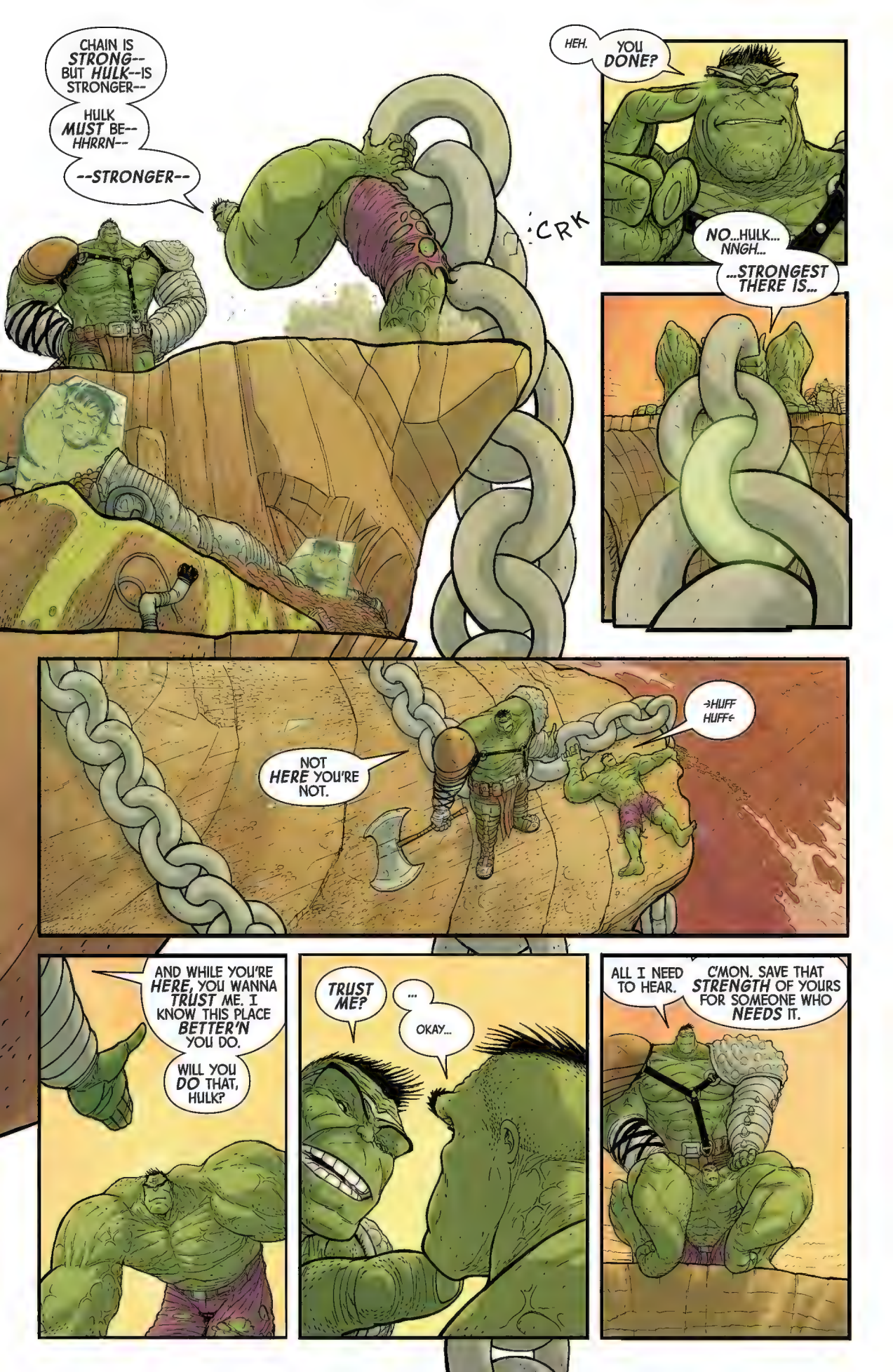
COME ON IF YOU'RE COMING.


BETTY FACE LOOK MAD AT HULK.
SAD AT HULK.
HULK NOT LIKE THIS...
I'VE TRIED TO FIX IT UP. THAT'S WHERE I'VE BEEN, IN CASE YOU CARED.
DOING THE WORK ON BANNER FROM THE INSIDE. OUT OF SIGHT.
HELPING HIM HEAL...
SNIFF
WHAT?
HULK... NOT SURE.
ODD SMELL.
MUST BE ALL THE TRASH AROUND HERE.
OH LOOK, HERE'S SOME OF IT NOW...
SAM KIETH
TIM SALE

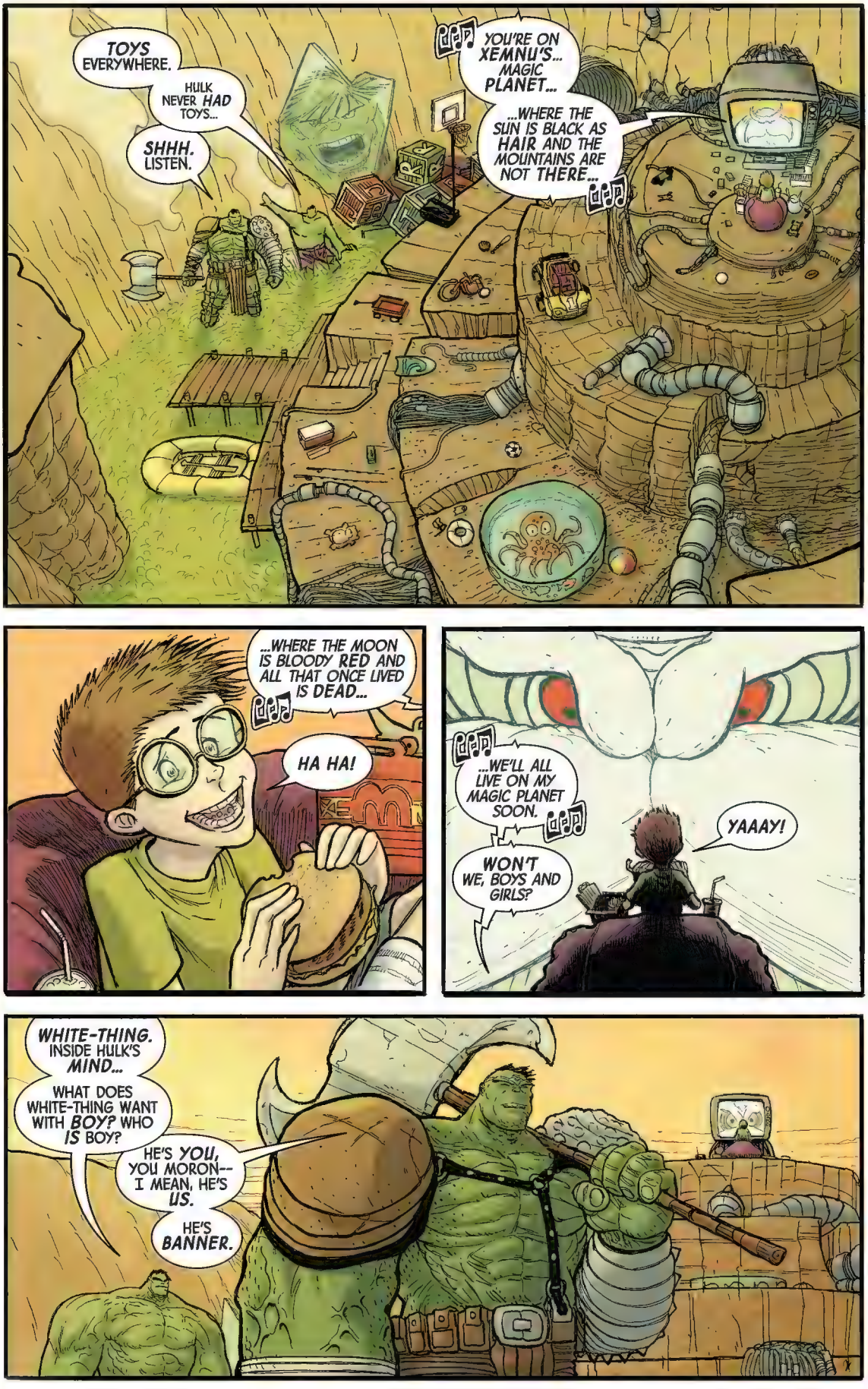

REMEMBER THIS GUY?
THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS. THE BIG, BAD DEVIL HULK WHO WANTED TO BREAK THE WORLD.
HNRR
THAT'S ONE GOOD THING THAT CAME OUTTA THIS. NO MORE OF THIS SCALY CREEP RUNNING THINGS.
HE'S LOCKED UP TIGHT AGAIN-- AND HE'S NEVER GETTING OUT.
HNRR
ARE YOU? HUH?
NOT SO SCARY NOW!
AAUUU
STOP.
STOP? STOP WHAT?
HE'S BEEN MAKING TROUBLE FROM THE START.
UUUU

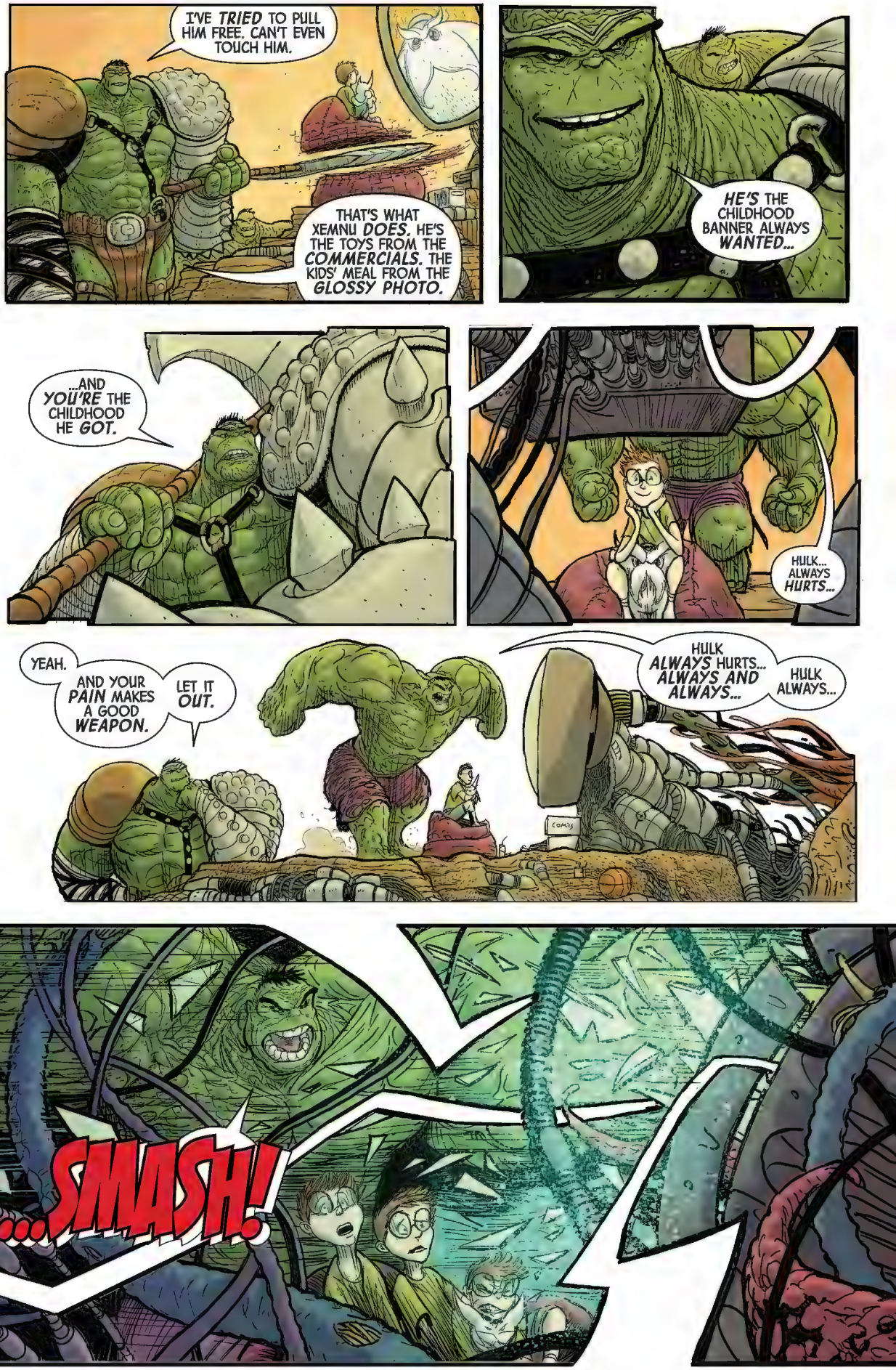
ORDERING YOU AROUND...TELLING YOU WHEN TO COME OUT, WHEN TO STAY IN...ACTING LIKE OUR DAD.
REMEMBER BRIAN BANNER, HULK?
...WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
PTOO
HULK IS HULK.
BUT HULK IS HULK TOO. AND HULK...HULK IS KIND TO HULK.
HULKS... ARE HULKS.
ALL HULKS--
--ARE-- HULKS--
YOU'RE NOT MAKING SENSE.
DON'T TOUCH THAT--

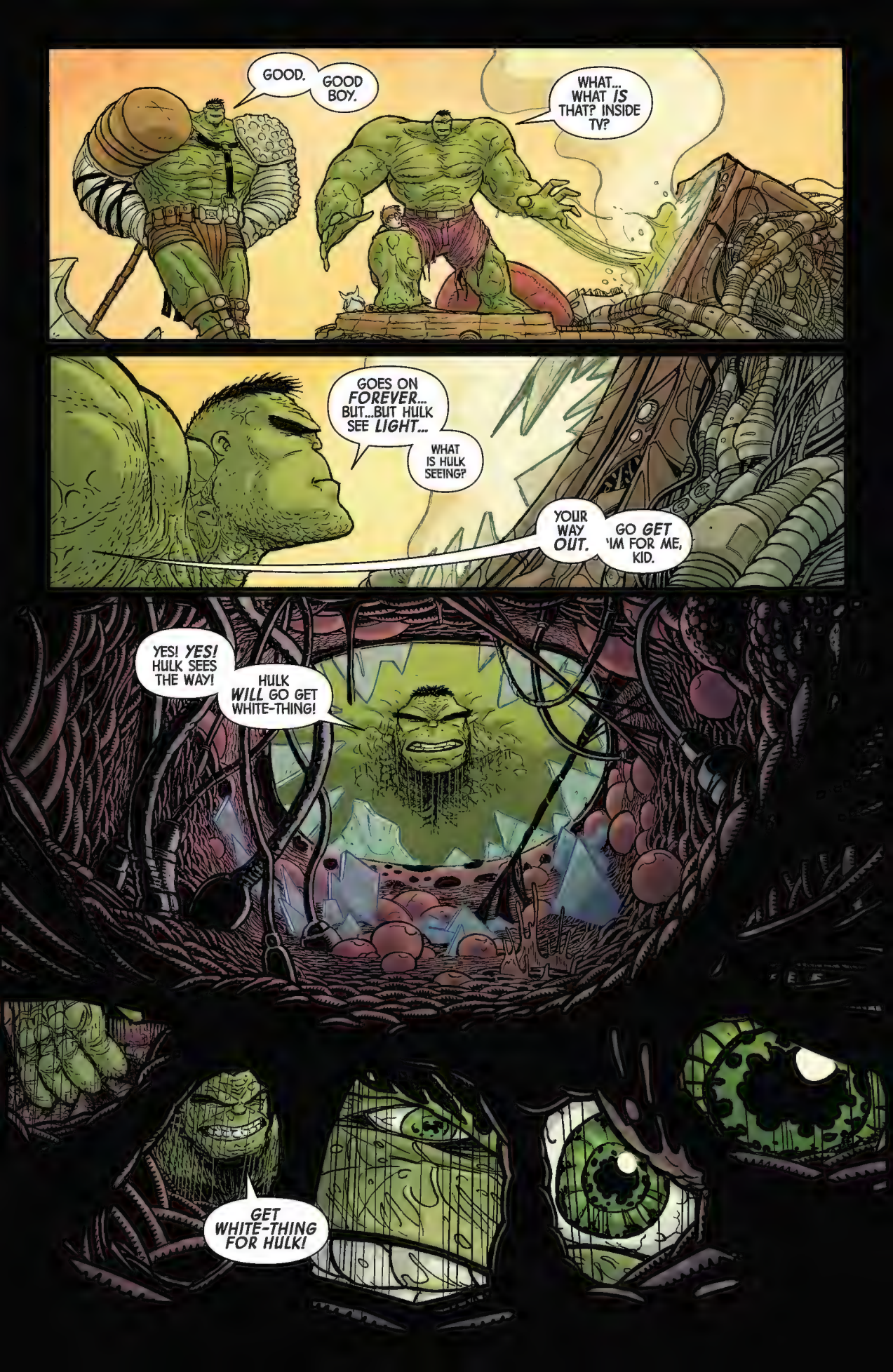
ALL.
HULKS.
BOB? ARE YOU OKAY?
I'D BETTER GO FIND BETTY--
I'M FINE-- I JUST-- THAT--
THAT'S NOT MY NAME
BOB!


CHAIN IS STRONG-- BUT HULK--IS STRONGER--
HULK MUST BE-- HHRRN--
--STRONGER--
CRK
HEH. YOU DONE?
NO...HULK... NNGH...
...STRONGEST THERE IS...
NOT HERE YOU'RE NOT.
→HUFF HUFF←
AND WHILE YOU'RE HERE, YOU WANNA TRUST ME. I KNOW THIS PLACE BETTER'N YOU DO.
WILL YOU DO THAT, HULK?
TRUST ME?
...
OKAY...
ALL I NEED TO HEAR.
C'MON. SAVE THAT STRENGTH OF YOURS FOR SOMEONE WHO NEEDS IT.

STRANGE. FIGURE IN AMBER.
PUNY GRAY HULK...?
JOE FIXIT. XEMNU GOT HIM FIRST.
LEAVE HIM-- HE'S USELESS TO US. WHAT'S A HULK WITHOUT PHYSICAL STRENGTH?
STILL HULK...
HRR. WHY AMBER?
WHY NOT CHAINED? LIKE OTHER HULK?
→SNIFF←
SOMETHING NOT SMELL RIGHT.
HULK-- HULK COULD BREAK JOE FREE--
WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE.
OVER THERE.
YOU'VE GOT WORK TO DO.
McGUINNESS


TOYS EVERYWHERE.
HULK NEVER HAD TOYS...
SHHH. LISTEN.
YOU'RE ON XEMNU'S... MAGIC PLANET...
...WHERE THE SUN IS BLACK AS HAIR AND THE MOUNTAINS ARE NOT THERE...
...WHERE THE MOON IS BLOODY RED AND ALL THAT ONCE LIVED IS DEAD...
HA HA!
...WE'LL ALL LIVE ON MY MAGIC PLANET SOON.
WON'T WE, BOYS AND GIRLS?
YAAAY!
WHITE-THING. INSIDE HULK'S MIND...
WHAT DOES WHITE-THING WANT WITH BOY? WHO IS BOY?
HE'S YOU, YOU MORON-- I MEAN, HE'S US.
HE'S BANNER.


I'VE TRIED TO PULL HIM FREE. CAN'T EVEN TOUCH HIM.
THAT'S WHAT XEMNU DOES. HE'S THE TOYS FROM THE COMMERCIALS. THE KIDS' MEAL FROM THE GLOSSY PHOTO.
HE'S THE CHILDHOOD BANNER ALWAYS WANTED...
...AND YOU'RE THE CHILDHOOD HE GOT.
HULK... ALWAYS HURTS...
YEAH.
AND YOUR PAIN MAKES A GOOD WEAPON.
LET IT OUT.
HULK ALWAYS HURTS... ALWAYS AND ALWAYS...
HULK ALWAYS...
...SMASH!


GOOD.
GOOD BOY.
WHAT... WHAT IS THAT? INSIDE TV?
GOES ON FOREVER... BUT...BUT HULK SEE LIGHT...
WHAT IS HULK SEEING?
YOUR WAY OUT.
GO GET 'IM FOR ME, KID.
YES! YES! HULK SEES THE WAY!
HULK WILL GO GET WHITE-THING!
GET WHITE-THING FOR HULK!

HE'S CHOKING-- GOD, HE'S STRONG, I CAN BARELY HOLD HIM--
LET ME THROUGH, LEN. I'VE GOT...
HHKKK--
...MEDICAL...
...TRAINING...
OH. THAT...
...IS NOT NORMAL.
HWWK
UWWLLK
HULK...

...HULK IS FREE!

...
UM...
HRRR. LISTEN TO HULK, GREEN-HAIR.
AND YOU, SCIENCE WOMAN.
WHITE-THING MADE HUMANS THINK HIM HULK--AND HULK NOT-HULK. WHEN HULK SAY HULK, HUMANS THINK HULK SAY NONSENSE WORDS--
--BUT HULK IS HULK. HULK WAS ALWAYS HULK. HULK WILL ALWAYS BE HULK.
HULK CAN SAY AGAIN IF PUNY HUMANS NOT GET IT.
YES, OF COURSE. NOW THAT WE KNOW WHAT XEMNU DOES, IT... WELL, IT'S EASIER TO...TO...
...THIS IS BRUCE'S HEAD...
I WOULDN'T WORRY, DOC.

I DON'T THINK HE'S *IN* IT.
NO. BRUCE BURST HIS *SKIN* ONCE. WHEN THE HULK BROKE OUT.
SO IT'S HAPPENED *BEFORE.*
KIND OF A VARIATION ON A *THEME,* HUH?
ISN'T IT *FASCINATING* TO SEE ALL THE NEW *PERMUTATIONS...?*
ENOUGH!
ENOUGH *TALK!* HULK IS *CHAINED* INSIDE! *ALL-THAT-IS-HULK*--HULK *SYSTEM*-- HAS BEEN *HURT!* AND *HURT!*
STUPID BANNER, *OTHER* HULKS-- THEY *BOSS* HULK! TELL HULK WHEN TO *COME,* WHEN TO *GO!* TALK AND TALK AND *TALK!*
BUT HULK ONLY HULK *LEFT!* IS *HULK'S TIME NOW!*
*AND* HULK NOT TALK!
*ROXXON* SENT BIG MONSTERS. BIG *SHOW* FOR *WHITE-THING.* SO WHITE-THING IS *WITH* ROXXON.
SO NOW HULK GO WHERE ROXXON *LIVES*-- AND HULK *FINISH* WHITE-THING!
*WHO IS WITH HULK?*

ROXXON PLAZA, NEW YORK.

WHAT IN THE--

OH GOD--

IT'S *THEM*-- *RUN*--

*GROUP* TRANSLOCATION. McGOWAN'S GETTING *BETTER* AT THIS...

HULK--THIS IS *NOT SMART*. LOOK *AROUND* YOU-- WE'RE *ALREADY* CAUSING PANIC.

BRUCE HAD A *PLAN* TO DEAL WITH ROXXON--CAREFULLY, *METHODICALLY*--

*TOO* CAREFUL. TOO MUCH *TALK*, TOO MUCH *WAITING*--GAVE BULL-MAN TIME TO HURT *EVERYONE*.

*STUPID* BANNER.

OH.

WHAT IN GOD'S NAME... *HAPPENED* HERE...?

*BULL-MAN* AND *WHITE-THING* HAPPEN.

TIME FOR *HULK PLAN*.

LESS *TALK* IN HULK PLAN! HULK PLAN *SIMPLE!*

*TWO WORDS ONLY!*

THIS IS A *NIGHTMARE!* WHERE DID THESE THINGS *COME* FROM?

WHAT *ARE* THEY...?

HULK'S RIGHT. SEE THE *METAL PARTS?* HOW THEY DON'T HAVE *MOUTHS?* THEY CAME FROM *XEMNU.*

AND THAT TELLS YOU WHAT THEY *WERE...*

IF WHITE-THING MAKE THEM--HULK *UNMAKE* THEM!

HULK SMASH THEM ALL!

"WHAT-- WHAT IS GOING ON--?"

THIS IS CHAOS!
FIRST THE HULK COMES HERE-- THE SAME HULK YOU SAID YOU HAD UNDER YOUR CONTROL-- AND THEN--
WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS? IS--IS THAT TRAVERS?
YOU ATE TRAVERS--
I CONVERTED HIM.
SINCE I INTERNALIZED THE CONVERSION PROCESS... IT NOURISHES ME.
AND I WAS VEWY, VEWY HUNGWY.
THIS-- THIS IS A P.R. DISASTER--
SECURITY! CLOSE THE SHUTTERS--LOCK DOWN THE BUILDING! IF ANYONE SEES THESE THINGS--
SECURITY? ARE YOU...
...THERE...?
I WAS VEWY HUNGWY. AND THEY WERE DISPOSABLE. ALL OF THEM.
YOU TAUGHT ME THAT.

GOD, NO! NO!
YOU CAN'T DO THIS--
OUR DEAL WAS SATISFACTORY, MR. AGGER.
NO! NO, I'D-- I'D HAVE KNOWN! I'M PROTECTED AGAINST YOU!
I--I REMEMBER BEING--
OH GOD.
BUT NOT SATISFACTORY ENOUGH.
BUSINESS DEMANDS WINNERS AND LOSERS, MR AGGER. THE STRONG AND THE WEAK.
YOU KNOW HOW THE SAUSAGE IS MADE...

MORE COMING.
TOO MANY TO FIGHT.
IF IT'S AGGER WHO'S CONTROLLING THESE CREATURES-- HE'LL BE AT THE TOP OF THE TOWER--
SO HULK SHOULD HAVE STARTED SMASHING UP ON ROOF?
BAH!
NOW YOU TELL HULK!
RRAAARGHH!
GOLD BOX IS IN HULK'S WAY!

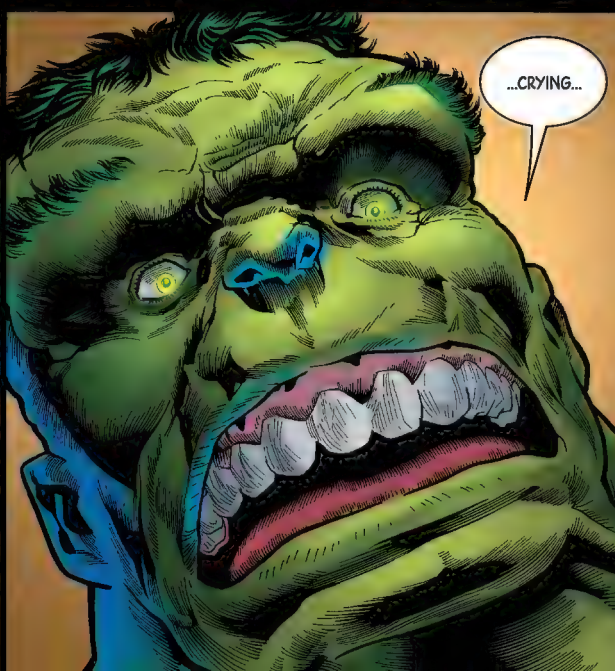
STUPID GOLD BOX!
CAREFUL--

HULK GO UP NOW. SMASH BULL-MAN-- WHITE-THING TOO.
HULK'S FRIENDS COME...?

I'LL STAY-- SOMEONE NEEDS TO STOP THESE THINGS FROM GETTING ONTO THE STREET.
AGREED.

THEN I GUESS IT'S YOU AND ME, BUDDY.
YES. HULK AND RICK.
RICK IS GOOD FRIEND.

BULL-MAN? COME OUT, BULL-MAN.
HRRR. SOUND LIKE SOMEONE IS...


...CRYING...

MMRRRUU

HELLO.
HELLO, HULK.
SHOULDN'T YOU BE SUBDUING THIS PLANET FOR ME?
WHITE-THING!
HULK-- HULK WILL--
HUSH.
YOUR MIND IS ORGANIZED DIFFERENTLY THAN OTHER HUMAN MINDS, HULK. NO LESS POWERFUL...
...BUT NO MORE SO EITHER. ONLY DIFFERENT.
I KNOW NOW WHERE YOU ARE WEAK.
I KNOW WHERE YOU ARE ALL WEAK.
HELLO, BOYS AND GIRLS.

HELLO, XEMNU.

I CANNOT CONTROL YOU, HULK. BUT I CAN CONTROL THE OTHER PARTS OF YOU.
I CAN MAKE THEM LOCK YOU IN THE DARKNESS FOREVER.

IT TAKES POWER. I MUST REACH OUT--DRAW FROM ALL THE SOULS I HAVE TOUCHED.
BUT YOU DON'T MIND, DO YOU, BOYS AND GIRLS?

MY MISTAKE WAS ALWAYS TREATING YOU AS A SIMPLE MONSTER. BUT YOU'RE NOT A MONSTER, HULK.
NNUUHHR--

YOU ARE A CHILD...

...AND I AM A CHILDHOOD.
WELCOME TO THE MAGIC PLANET.

THAT'S ENOUGH, XEMNU.
I'M WARNING YOU--YOU'RE MAKING A SERIOUS MISTAKE HERE.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH--
OH ME, OH MY. SHINING YOUR LITTLE GREEN LIGHT, MR. JONES? FEEDING HIM GAMMA?
FEED HIS BODY IF YOU LIKE.
I ALREADY HAVE HIS MIND.
ONLY SOME OF IT. WHAT WAS AVAILABLE.
LOOK DEEPER, XEMNU.
LOOK WHO'S COMING UP TO MEET YOU.
"WELCOME TO THE MAGIC PLANET," HUH?

WELCOME TO PLANET HULK!
WRONG!
WELCOME TO MY PLANET!
SHHLLK

KKRXXSSS
WHAT...?
WAS...WAS THAT...
...THE HULK...?
WHAT...WHAT HAPPENED...?
EVERYTHING WENT DARK... HULK WENT AWAY, AND... AND THEN...
AND THEN YOU BEAT THE BAD GUY, HULK. JUST LIKE ALWAYS.
WHY DON'T YOU HEAD BACK DOWN? I BET SAMSON AND BETTY COULD USE SOME HELP MOPPING UP...
Y-YES...
HULK...HULK WILL DO AS RICK SAYS. RICK...IS FRIEND.
RICK IS GOOD FRIEND.

HRM.
"RICK IS GOOD FRIEND."
IS IT SILLY IF THAT GOT ME IN THE HEART A LITTLE?
I MEAN, IF ONLY HE KNEW, EH?
ANYWAY. WHAT TO DO WITH THE MINOTAUR?
THE CRASS LITTLE BILLIONAIRE WHO THOUGHT THE FOUR WINDS WOULD FOREVER BOW TO HIM. SO YOU SUMMONED THEM... AND IN THEY HAVE BLOWN.
BUT YOU COULDN'T CONTROL XEMNU. SO YOU MOST CERTAINLY CAN'T CONTROL ME, CAN YOU? NOT NOW...
MMUUUU
THAT SAID, YOU COULD STILL BE USEFUL, EVEN AS WRETCHED AS YOU ARE. SO I'LL LET YOU LIVE--IF YOU CALL THIS LIVING.
BUT YOU'RE TO LEAVE BANNER TO ME FROM NOW ON. I NEED YOU TO UNDERSTAND YOUR PLACE IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS, DARIO.
IN THIS WORLD, THERE ARE THOSE WHO FOLLOW...

# THE THOUGHTFUL MAN

34

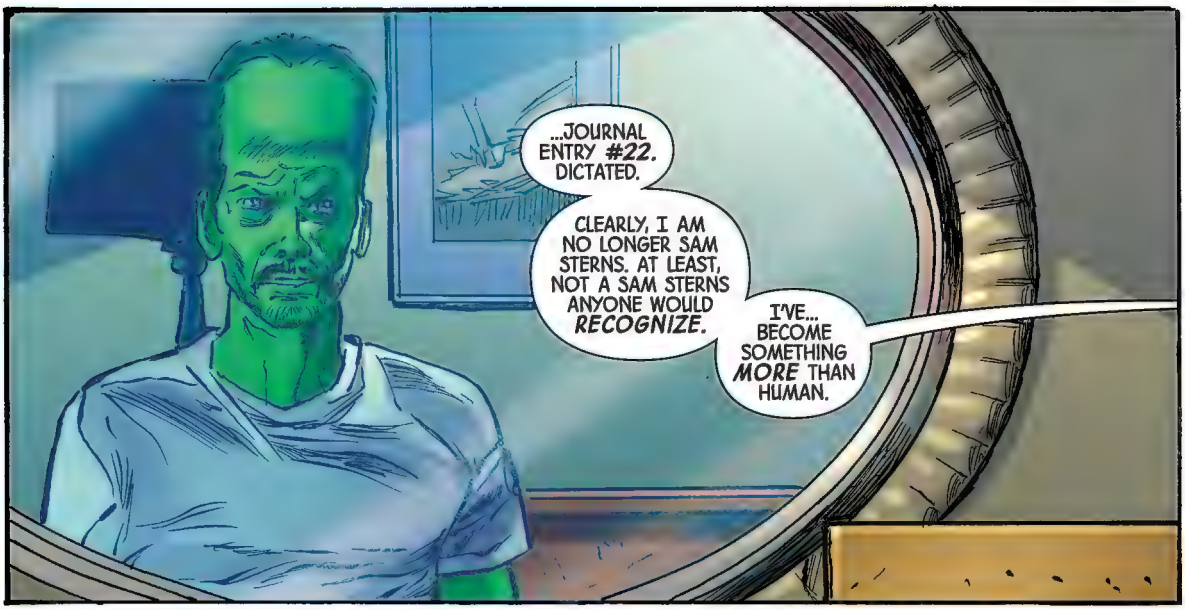
"Oh, I got a message from below
'Twas from a man I used to know
About a year or so ago
Before he departed
He is just as happy as can be."

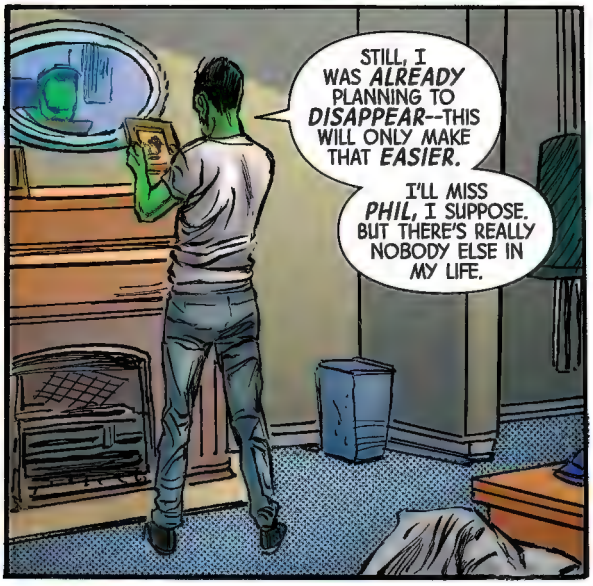
– Irving Berlin
"Pack Up Your Sins (And Go to the Devil)"

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.
Journal entry #1:
My name is Sam Sterns. I've spent my life hauling crap.
OH... I GOT A MESSAGE FROM BE-LOW...
WAS FROM A MAN I USEDTA KNOW...
And then I died.
ABOUT A YEAR OR SO A-GO, BEFORE...
...HE...
HSSS

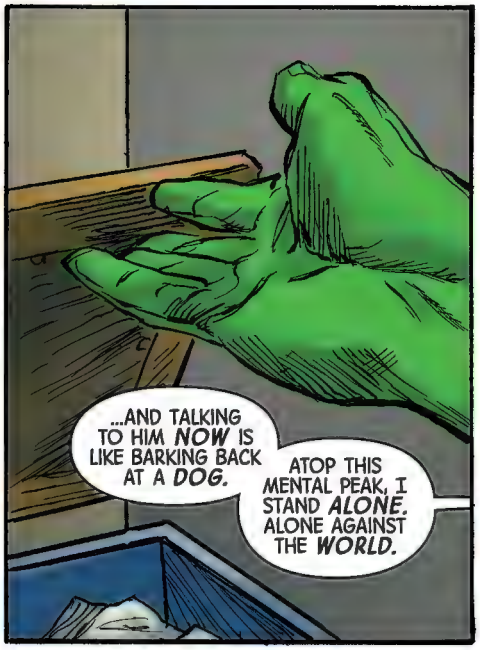
I was at the plant, hauling some crap down to the incinerator. I took a shortcut through one of the disused storage rooms.
And boom.
Turns out we had a contract with some military base in New Mexico to store something--had to do with gamma isotopes. My brother would know.
Anyway, some jerk stored it in the wrong place, and then I walked past.
Million-to-one freak accident.
It hurt more than anything ever has. It felt like my head was burning from the inside, right up until my heart stopped.
I remember the whole thing.

I don't really remember what happened after.
I think...
I think maybe I saw something.
NNN.. NN...
NNNAAAAAHHH!
I don't know what.
But they say I screamed my throat raw for an hour straight and passed right back out.
I asked the nurses for this typewriter, to write this down. Get it clear in my head. And I asked for books.
I want to read up on stuff. I never had any faith in a higher power or whatever, but there's a reason I came back.
I just need to know what I saw.
I need to know.


...JOURNAL ENTRY #22. DICTATED.
CLEARLY, I AM NO LONGER SAM STERNS. AT LEAST, NOT A SAM STERNS ANYONE WOULD RECOGNIZE.
I'VE... BECOME SOMETHING MORE THAN HUMAN.


STILL, I WAS ALREADY PLANNING TO DISAPPEAR--THIS WILL ONLY MAKE THAT EASIER.
I'LL MISS PHIL, I SUPPOSE. BUT THERE'S REALLY NOBODY ELSE IN MY LIFE.

JUST MY BROTHER.
THE SMARTEST MAN I EVER KNEW...


...AND TALKING TO HIM NOW IS LIKE BARKING BACK AT A DOG.
ATOP THIS MENTAL PEAK, I STAND ALONE. ALONE AGAINST THE WORLD.

AFTER ALL, WHO ELSE IN THE WORLD COULD UNDERSTAND?
GAMMA BOMB TEST GOES WRONG

LEADER'S JOURNAL, ENTRY #35. DICTATED VIA MENTAL IMPRESSION.
WHEN I SET OUT TO STEAL DR. BANNER'S RESEARCH, I WASN'T EXPECTING THIS. I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE...BUT I'M NOT.
THERE IS ANOTHER.
THAT TITANIC MONSTER ALSO HAS GREEN SKIN-- CAN IT BE THAT HIS STRENGTH IS A RESULT OF THE GAMMA RAYS, AS MY INTELLECT IS?
I MUST STUDY HIM. IF I CAN MAKE HIM AN ALLY...OR A TOOL...IT COULD OPEN THE WAY TO KNOWLEDGE BEYOND ANYTHING BANNER CAN TEACH ME.
KNOWLEDGE BEYOND LIMIT...

LEADER'S JOURNAL, ENTRY #587. DIRECT MEMORY TRANSCRIPTION.

I REMEMBER MY *SECOND* DEATH.

*AT LAST!* I CAN FEEL THE KNOWLEDGE TEEMING INTO MY BRAIN!

I WAS USING A THOUGHT-TRANSFER DEVICE BUILT BY THE *WATCHER*-- A *RECORD* OF ALL HE HAD EVER LEARNED.

I THOUGHT IF I KNEW *EVERYTHING*...I'D KNOW WHAT I *SAW*.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF A *THOUSAND* LONG-DEAD CIVILIZATIONS... A *MILLION* PLANETS... *A BILLION YEARS*...

BUT I WAS STILL TOO *HUMAN*. THE MACHINE BURNED OUT MY *SYNAPSES*.

NO...NOT *THAT*...

NO MORE! *NO MORE!*

I *DIED* AGAIN.

*NO MORE!*

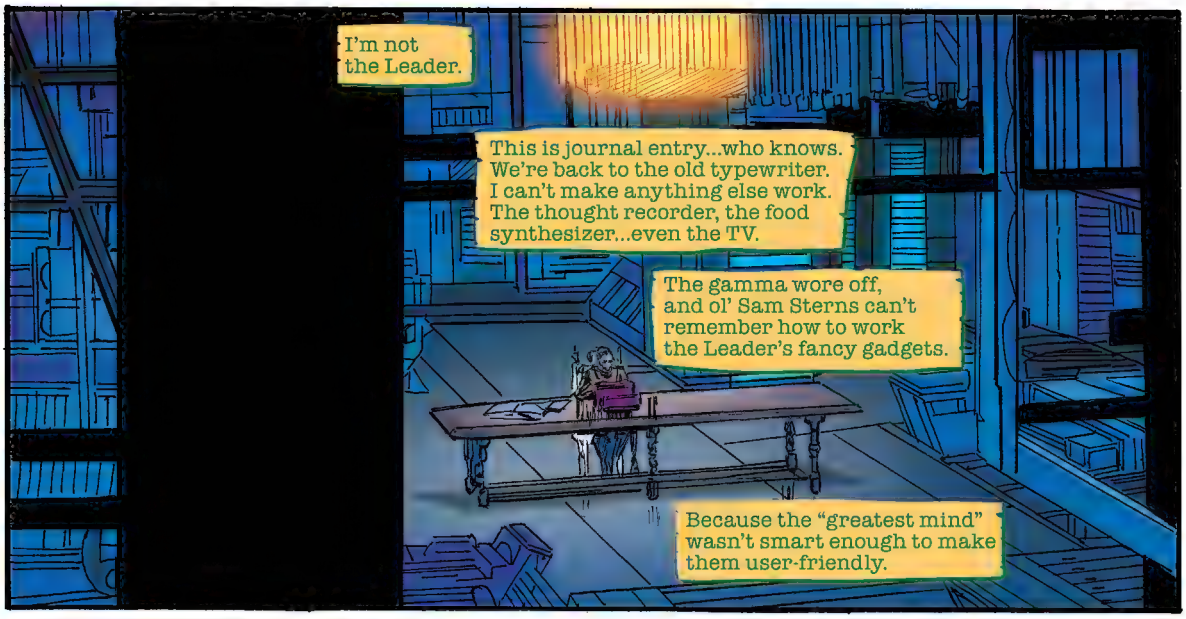
AND AFTER I DIED...I *SAW* SOMETHING.

*YOU.*

*YOU ARE MY CHILD.*

WHAT DID I *SEE?*

I DON'T REMEMBER.
MY OWN GENIUS BROUGHT ME BACK, OF COURSE.
JUST LIKE ALL THE TIMES AFTER.
LEADER'S TOTALL DISINTEGRATE
THERE IS NO HIGHER POWER.
IT WAS ME.
I WILLED MYSELF BACK THROUGH MIND ALONE.
BECAUSE I AM THE LEADER.
THE GREATEST MIND OF ALL.


I'm not the Leader.
This is journal entry...who knows. We're back to the old typewriter. I can't make anything else work. The thought recorder, the food synthesizer...even the TV.
The gamma wore off, and ol' Sam Sterns can't remember how to work the Leader's fancy gadgets.
Because the "greatest mind" wasn't smart enough to make them user-friendly.

The Leader was too smart to be smart.
Ha ha.

Wait. I've reverted before, haven't I? On purpose.
Part of a plan that failed... like all my plans failed...

...because I was too smart to be smart.
Too smart to get smarter. Too smart to learn.

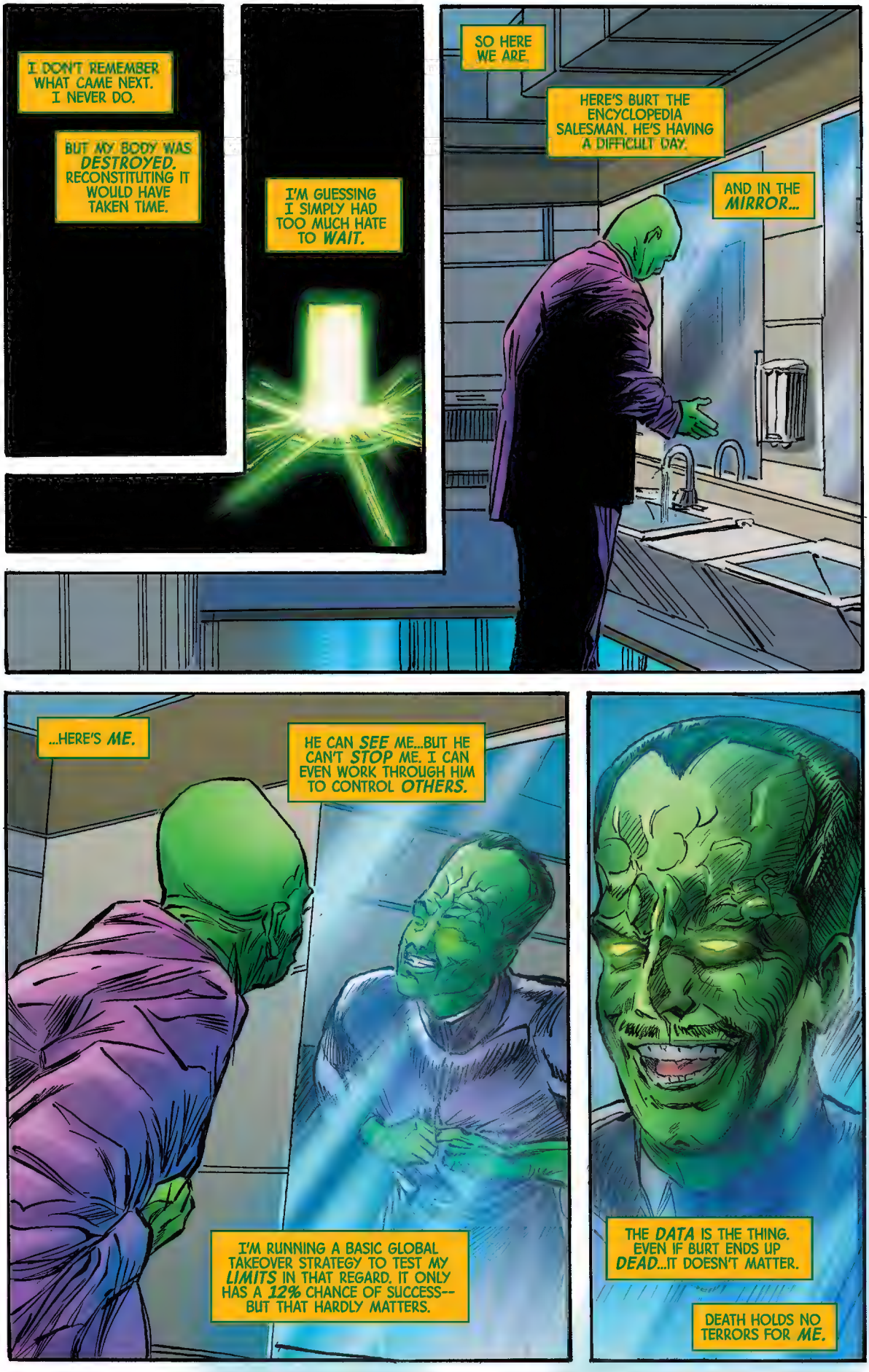
Did I do this to myself?

I'm not smart. But if I can get smart...smart enough to get it all back...
...when I get it back, I'll be smarter.

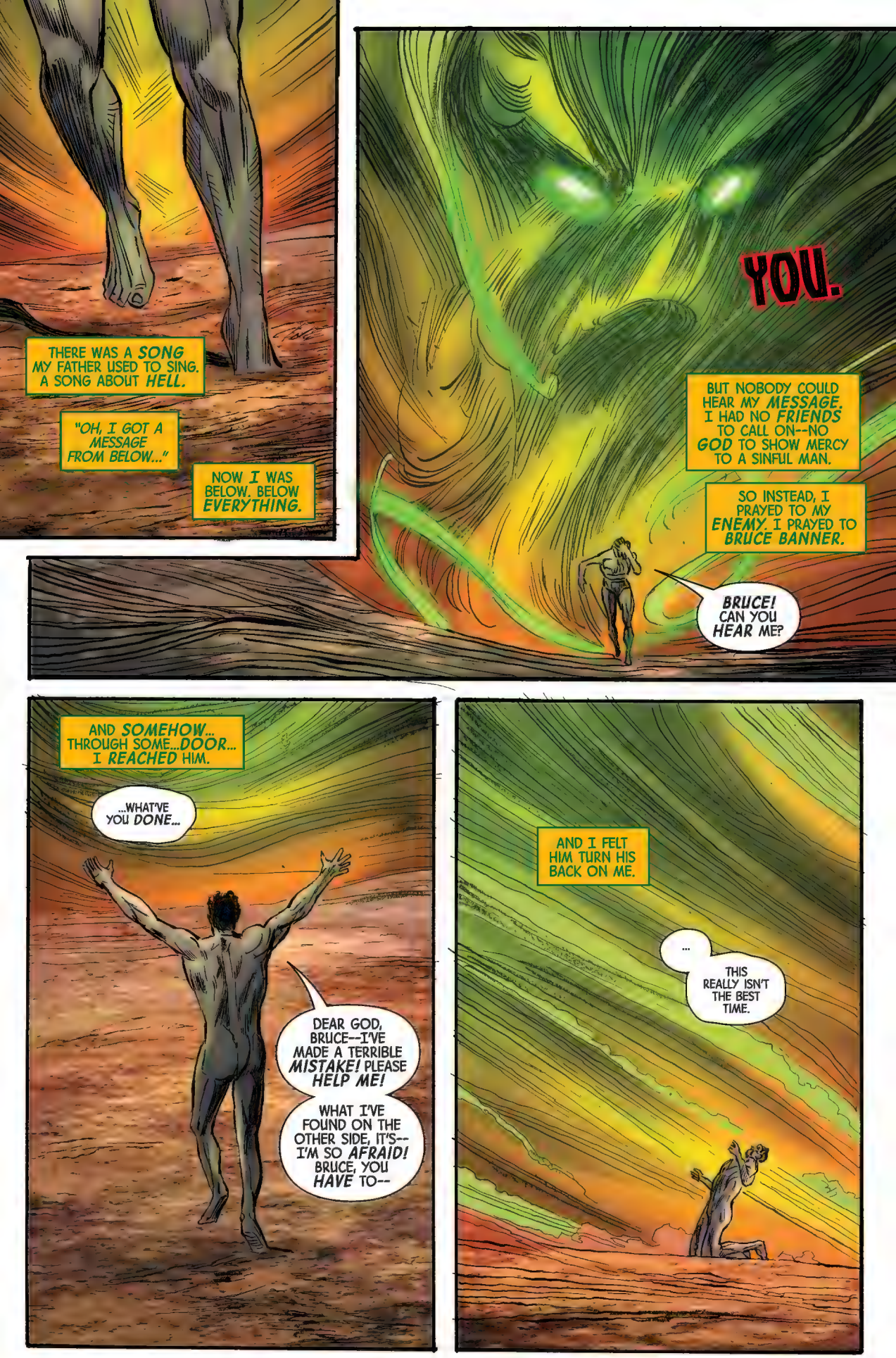
That sounds crazy. Is it crazy?
Or is this what it's like to have faith?

JOURNAL VOLUME 2, ENTRY #1. DICTATED--I'M IN THE MOOD TO MONOLOGUE.
THE LEADER IS BACK...AND BETTER THAN EVER. FORCING MYSELF TO THINK SERIOUSLY AS STERNS LOOSENED MY SELF-IMPOSED RESTRICTIONS.
IT TAUGHT ME TO IMPROVISE-- TO WORK OUTSIDE THE BOX. AS I KNEW IT WOULD.
AND WHEN I BECAME THE LEADER AGAIN, THAT ADDITIONAL CUNNING WAS BOOSTED EXPONENTIALLY.
A LITTLE TOUCH OF CHAOS MAKES YOU STRONGER, IT SEEMS.
LET'S SEE IF MIDDLETOWN AGREES.
POPULATION-- ALMOST FIVE THOUSAND. DETONATING A GAMMA BOMB THERE SHOULD GET ME AT LEAST TWO SPECIMENS.
WITH THE RIGHT GAMMA MUTATIONS, THEY COULD CHANGE THE WHOLE SCOPE OF MY RESEARCH.
PROJECTED GAMMA RADIUS
AND AS A BONUS... MAYBE I'LL EVEN KILL THE HULK THIS TIME.
I HAVE FAITH.

JOURNAL ENTRY 2/107. MEMORY TRANSCRIPT WITH ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS. BUT...WHAT TO THINK? WHAT IN HEAVEN TO THINK?
THE MIDDLETOWN EXPERIMENT YIELDED FIVE GAMMA MUTATES--FOUR WITHIN EXPECTATIONS. (BURT THE ENCYCLOPEDIA SALESMAN BECAME A VERSION OF ME.)
BUT...THE FIFTH. FATHER JASON McCALL--"SOUL MAN." A MAN WHO CAN BRING SOULS BACK FROM THE AFTERLIFE THROUGH GAMMA RADIATION.
HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? EVEN WITH MY OWN EXPERIENCES, I... I NEVER TRULY BELIEVED. I JUST WANTED A VERSION OF IMMORTALITY I COULD CONTROL.
BUT NOW...WHAT TO THINK?
MY GOD... HOW COULD I NOT HAVE REALIZED...
WHAT IN HEAVEN TO THINK?
AND THEN THE HULK ARRIVED, AS HE DOES.
HE LOST CONTROL AND KILLED McCALL--NOT TO MENTION ME.
AND I'VE NEVER HATED HIM MORE.


I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT CAME NEXT. I NEVER DO.
BUT MY BODY WAS DESTROYED. RECONSTITUTING IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN TIME.
I'M GUESSING I SIMPLY HAD TOO MUCH HATE TO WAIT.
SO HERE WE ARE.
HERE'S BURT THE ENCYCLOPEDIA SALESMAN. HE'S HAVING A DIFFICULT DAY.
AND IN THE MIRROR...
...HERE'S ME.
HE CAN SEE ME...BUT HE CAN'T STOP ME. I CAN EVEN WORK THROUGH HIM TO CONTROL OTHERS.
I'M RUNNING A BASIC GLOBAL TAKEOVER STRATEGY TO TEST MY LIMITS IN THAT REGARD. IT ONLY HAS A 12% CHANCE OF SUCCESS-- BUT THAT HARDLY MATTERS.
THE DATA IS THE THING. EVEN IF BURT ENDS UP DEAD...IT DOESN'T MATTER.
DEATH HOLDS NO TERRORS FOR ME.

I REMEMBER BEING TERRIFIED.
JOURNAL ENTRY...I DON'T KNOW. I'M TRYING TO REMEMBER IT WITHOUT GOING MAD.
BURT DID DIE, AND I AWOKE INSIDE A GAMMA-MUTATED SCORPION--LEFTOVERS FROM AN OLD EXPERIMENT. AND SO--USING ALL I HAD LEARNED--I BUILT A NEW BODY.
ONE THAT COULD JOURNEY TO MY AFTERLIFE--AND THIS TIME, REMEMBER EVERYTHING I SAW.
I CAN FEEL IT... I CAN SEE... OH, IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL...!
I'M GOING TO TRY TO TOUCH IT...
I EVEN FORGAVE BANNER. I NEEDED A WITNESS, AND HE WAS THE ONLY ONE IN THE WORLD...WHO MIGHT UNDERSTAND...
OH, DEAR GOD.
NO!
AS IF ANYONE COULD UNDERSTAND.
NOOOOO!
AS IF ANYONE COULD UNDERSTAND WHAT I SAW.


THERE WAS A SONG MY FATHER USED TO SING. A SONG ABOUT HELL.
"OH, I GOT A MESSAGE FROM BELOW..."
NOW I WAS BELOW. BELOW EVERYTHING.
YOU.
BUT NOBODY COULD HEAR MY MESSAGE. I HAD NO FRIENDS TO CALL ON--NO GOD TO SHOW MERCY TO A SINFUL MAN.
SO INSTEAD, I PRAYED TO MY ENEMY. I PRAYED TO BRUCE BANNER.
BRUCE! CAN YOU HEAR ME?
AND SOMEHOW... THROUGH SOME...DOOR... I REACHED HIM.
...WHAT'VE YOU DONE...
DEAR GOD, BRUCE--I'VE MADE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE! PLEASE HELP ME!
WHAT I'VE FOUND ON THE OTHER SIDE, IT'S-- I'M SO AFRAID! BRUCE, YOU HAVE TO--
AND I FELT HIM TURN HIS BACK ON ME.
...
THIS REALLY ISN'T THE BEST TIME.

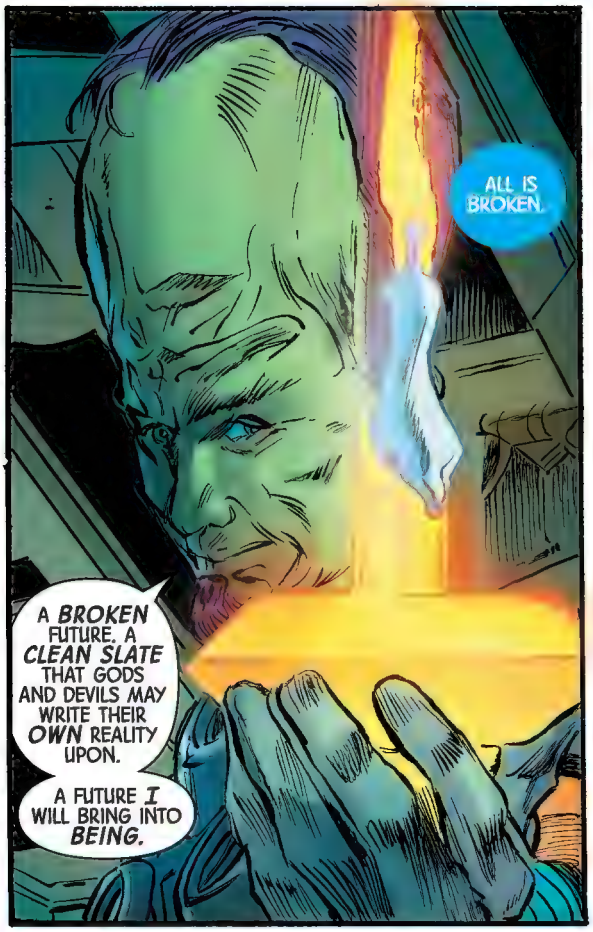
AND IN THAT MOMENT-- REJECTED BY THE ONE MAN WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN MY FRIEND--
--I KNEW THERE WAS NOWHERE LEFT TO RUN.
INSTEAD, I TURNED AROUND.
I LOOKED HELL IN THE FACE.
AND I, AT LAST, KNEW FAITH.
FAITH IN MYSELF. IN SAMUEL STERNS... THE LEADER.
AND IN MY ALL-CONSUMING HATE.
YOU ARE MY CHILD.
YOU BEAR MY MARK.
YOU DON'T SAY.
I KNOW NOW...I'LL RETURN THERE. BUT ONLY ON MY TERMS.
WHEN I CAN OPEN THE DOOR MYSELF... AND CONTROL IT.

JOURNAL ENTRY 3/498. I'VE HAD SOME FALSE STARTS.
BUT COMBINING GAMMA WITH COSMIC RADIATION IN ITS TERTIARY FORM-- PRIMAL KIRBONS--HAS YIELDED FASCINATING RESULTS.
THEY COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER SO WELL THAT I'M STARTING TO WONDER IF THEY SHARE A COMMON SOURCE...
JOURNAL ENTRY 3/540. MY ALLIES WANT TO TAKE OVER AMERICA.
IT'S A HARMLESS ENOUGH GOAL. AND IT MEANS I GET TO EXPERIMENT FREELY ON BANNER'S ASSOCIATES.
THUNDERBOLT ROSS MIGHT BE THE MOST INSECURE MAN I'VE EVER MET.
Journal entry 3/582. Back to the typewriter. Ross drained my gamma-- I thought he might.
But he left me alive, so he'll need me later. I put on a little act for him... but I can wait.
Every time I'm Sam, Sam's a little bit smarter.

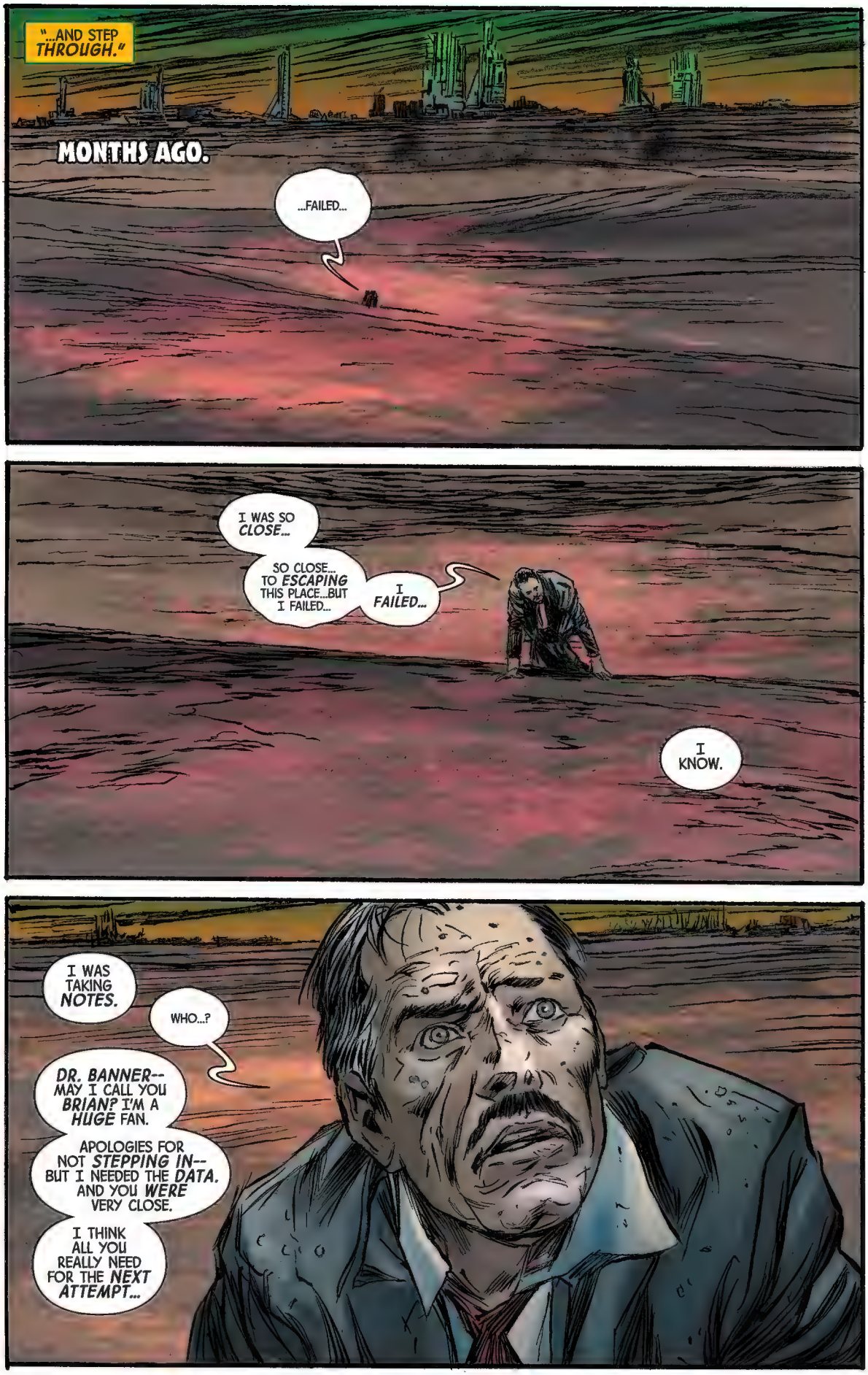
JOURNAL ENTRY... HA! 3/666!
A GOOD OMEN, WHEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH MEPHISTO. HE'LL BETRAY ME EVENTUALLY, OF COURSE--IT'S WHAT HE DOES.
BUT SPENDING TIME IN A MORE TRADITIONAL HELL WILL BE INVALUABLE FOR MY OCCULT STUDIES.
JOURNAL ENTRY 3/797.
I'VE MERGED MY INTELLECT WITH AN A.I. NAMED GAMMON--BANNER'S CREATION, DURING ONE OF HIS INTERMITTENT SPELLS OF TRUE GENIUS.
AS A MACHINE INTELLIGENCE, IT HAS NO REAL NEED FOR A PERSONALITY--IT'S HAPPY TO ACCEPT MINE, TO BETTER ACHIEVE OUR SHARED GOALS.
ONE OF MY MORE REWARDING FRIENDSHIPS.
JOURNAL ENTRY 3/922.
SHE-HULK OBVIOUSLY DIED FIGHTING THANOS. I THINK SHE KNOWS IT, TOO--BUT SHE'S REPRESSED THE MEMORY, AS I ONCE DID.
I WONDER... HOW WOULD SHE REACT IF SHE DIED AGAIN?
OR...KILLED SOMEONE ELSE?

JOURNAL ENTRY 4/1--A NEW CHAPTER. AND YET, I FIND MYSELF THINKING OF THE PAST.
I'LL MISS DR. ALBA--I HOPE SHE'S DOING WELL. AND I WAS SORRY NOT TO STAY.

BUT I HAVE KNOWLEDGE THAT I SIMPLY REFUSE TO SHARE.
I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE.
BROKEN.


ALL IS BROKEN.
A BROKEN FUTURE. A CLEAN SLATE THAT GODS AND DEVILS MAY WRITE THEIR OWN REALITY UPON.
A FUTURE I WILL BRING INTO BEING.

HULK SIGHTINGS ARE INCREASINGLY COMMON. HE LIVES AGAIN--AS I KNEW HE WOULD.
WHICH MEANS IT'S TIME TO BRING ALL I'VE LEARNED TO BEAR. TIME TO DEPART THIS LIFE.
TIME TO OPEN THE DOOR...


"...AND STEP THROUGH."
MONTHS AGO.
...FAILED...
I WAS SO CLOSE...
SO CLOSE... TO ESCAPING THIS PLACE...BUT I FAILED...
I FAILED...
I KNOW.
I WAS TAKING NOTES.
WHO...?
DR. BANNER-- MAY I CALL YOU BRIAN? I'M A HUGE FAN.
APOLOGIES FOR NOT STEPPING IN-- BUT I NEEDED THE DATA. AND YOU WERE VERY CLOSE.
I THINK ALL YOU REALLY NEED FOR THE NEXT ATTEMPT...

# THE APOTHEOSIS OF SAMUEL STERNS

0

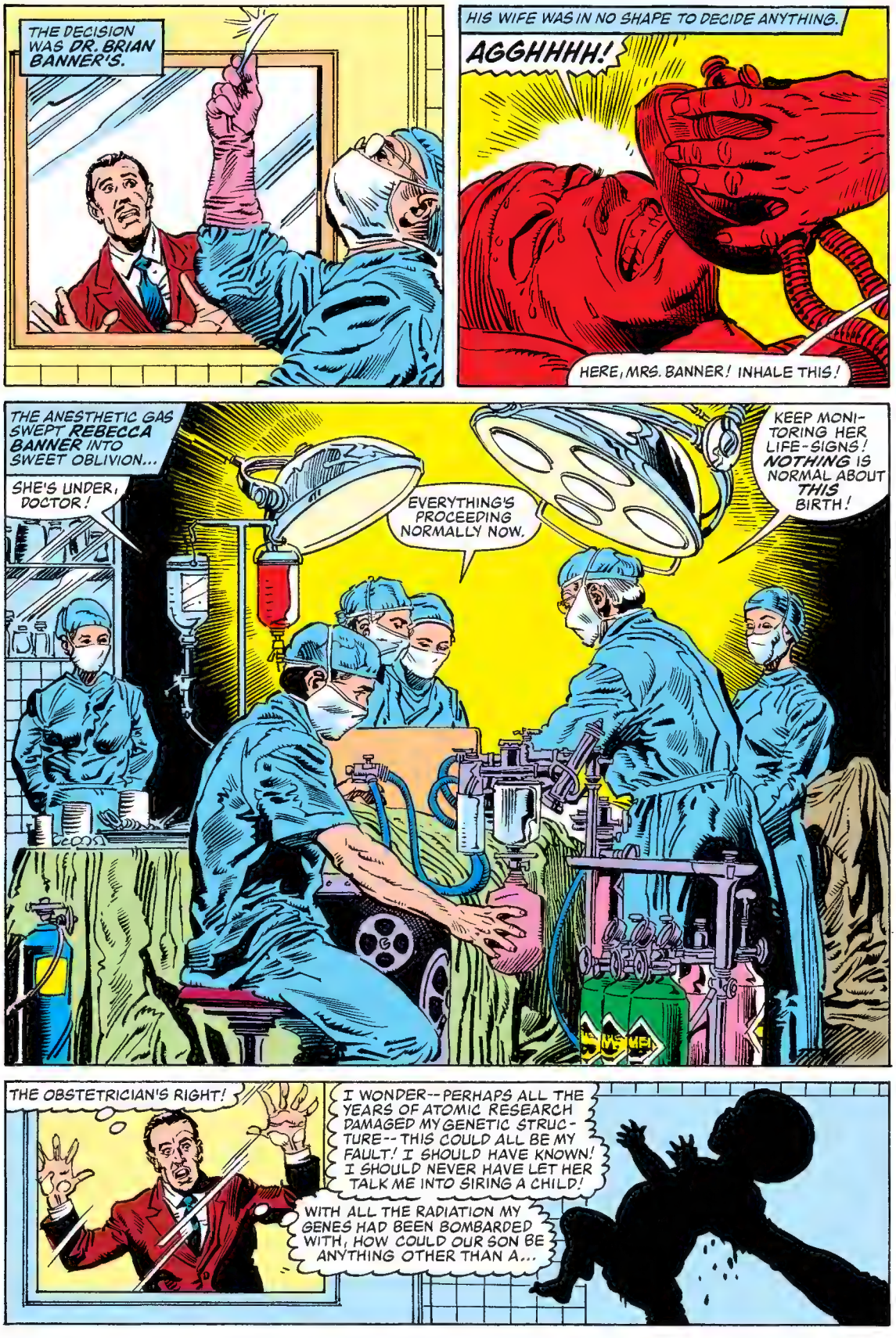
"And who shall repay him what he hath done? Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb."

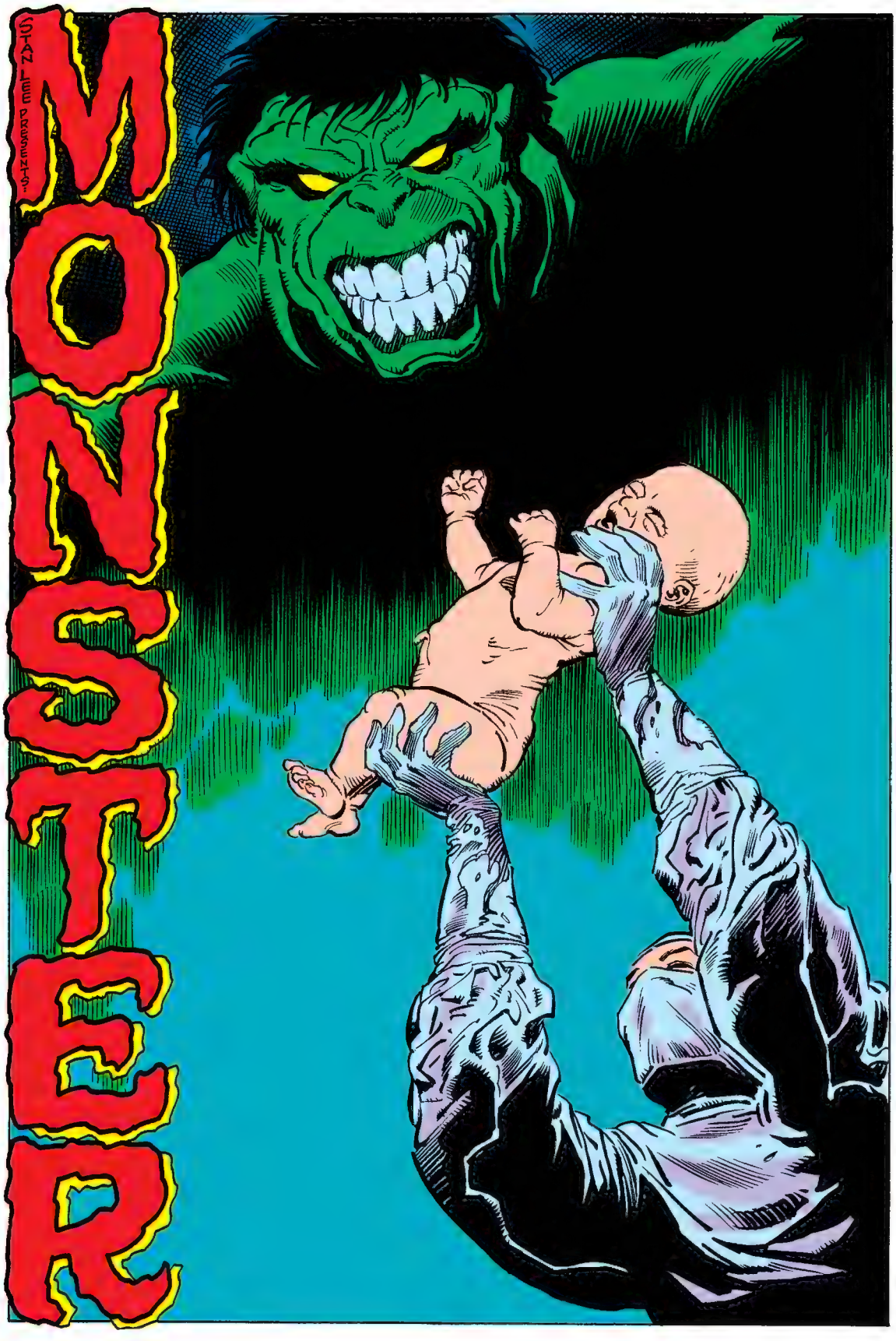
— Job 21:31-32

REBECCA?
I...I THOUGHT I HEARD YOU *SCREAMING.*
THERE WAS A *HOSPITAL*... YOU HAD SOME... *DISEASE* INSIDE YOU...
OH GOD.
NO.

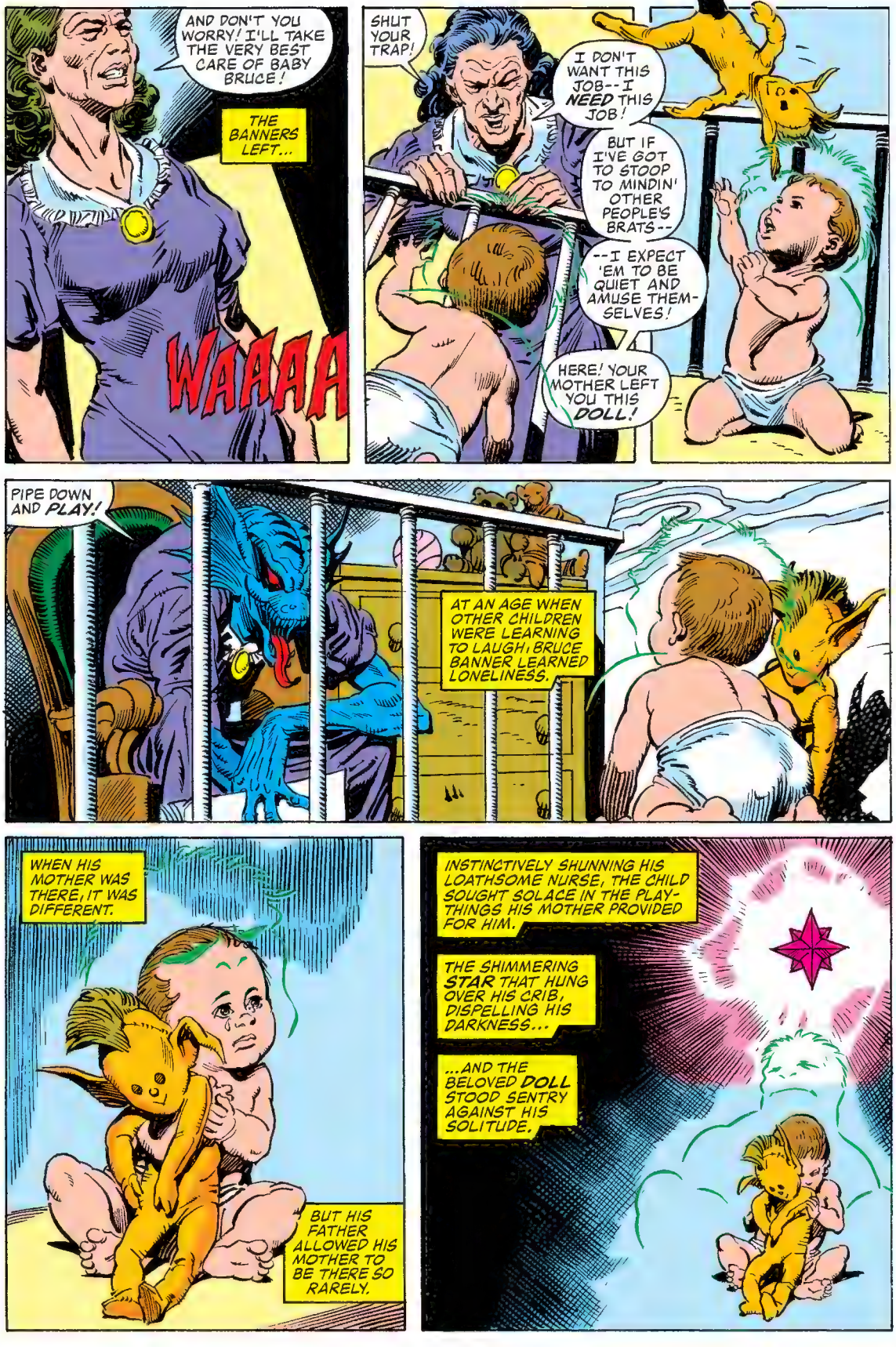
NO, NO, NO...
REBECCA BANNER
YOU'RE NOT DEAD, REBECCA! YOU'RE NOT!
STOP IT! STOP FAKING!
STOP FAKING, REBECCA! GET UP OFF THE DRIVEWAY!
YOU'RE-- YOU'RE ONLY MAKING A FOOL OF YOURSELF--
--A FOOL OF YOURSELF, REBECCA! GET OUT OF THERE--GET--
WHAT...?
WHAT IS THIS...?
THIS...THIS WAS FROM THE HOUSE, WASN'T IT? IN DAYTON...
DAYTON, OHIO...
A LIFETIME AGO...

**BILL MANTLO** STORY | **MIKE MIGNOLA** ART | **JIM NOVAK** LETTERS | **BOB SHAREN** COLORS | **CARL POTTS** EDITOR | **JIM SHOOTER** EDITOR IN CHIEF

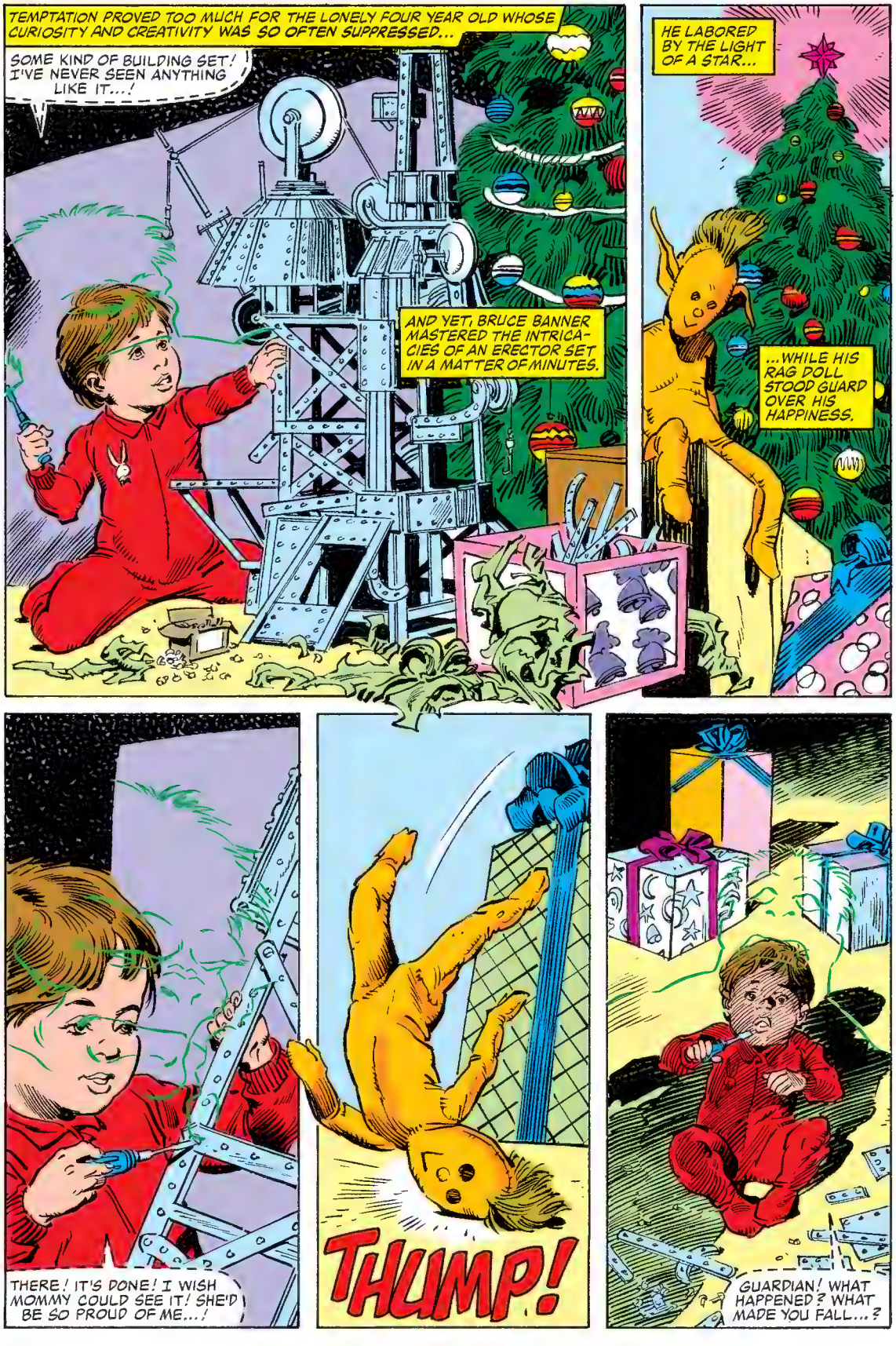

THE DECISION WAS DR. BRIAN BANNER'S.
HIS WIFE WAS IN NO SHAPE TO DECIDE ANYTHING.
AGGHHHH!
HERE, MRS. BANNER! INHALE THIS!
THE ANESTHETIC GAS SWEPT REBECCA BANNER INTO SWEET OBLIVION...
SHE'S UNDER, DOCTOR!
EVERYTHING'S PROCEEDING NORMALLY NOW.
KEEP MONITORING HER LIFE-SIGNS! NOTHING IS NORMAL ABOUT THIS BIRTH!
THE OBSTETRICIAN'S RIGHT!
I WONDER--PERHAPS ALL THE YEARS OF ATOMIC RESEARCH DAMAGED MY GENETIC STRUCTURE--THIS COULD ALL BE MY FAULT! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN! I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET HER TALK ME INTO SIRING A CHILD!
WITH ALL THE RADIATION MY GENES HAD BEEN BOMBARDED WITH, HOW COULD OUR SON BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN A...


STAN LEE PRESENTS:
MONSTER

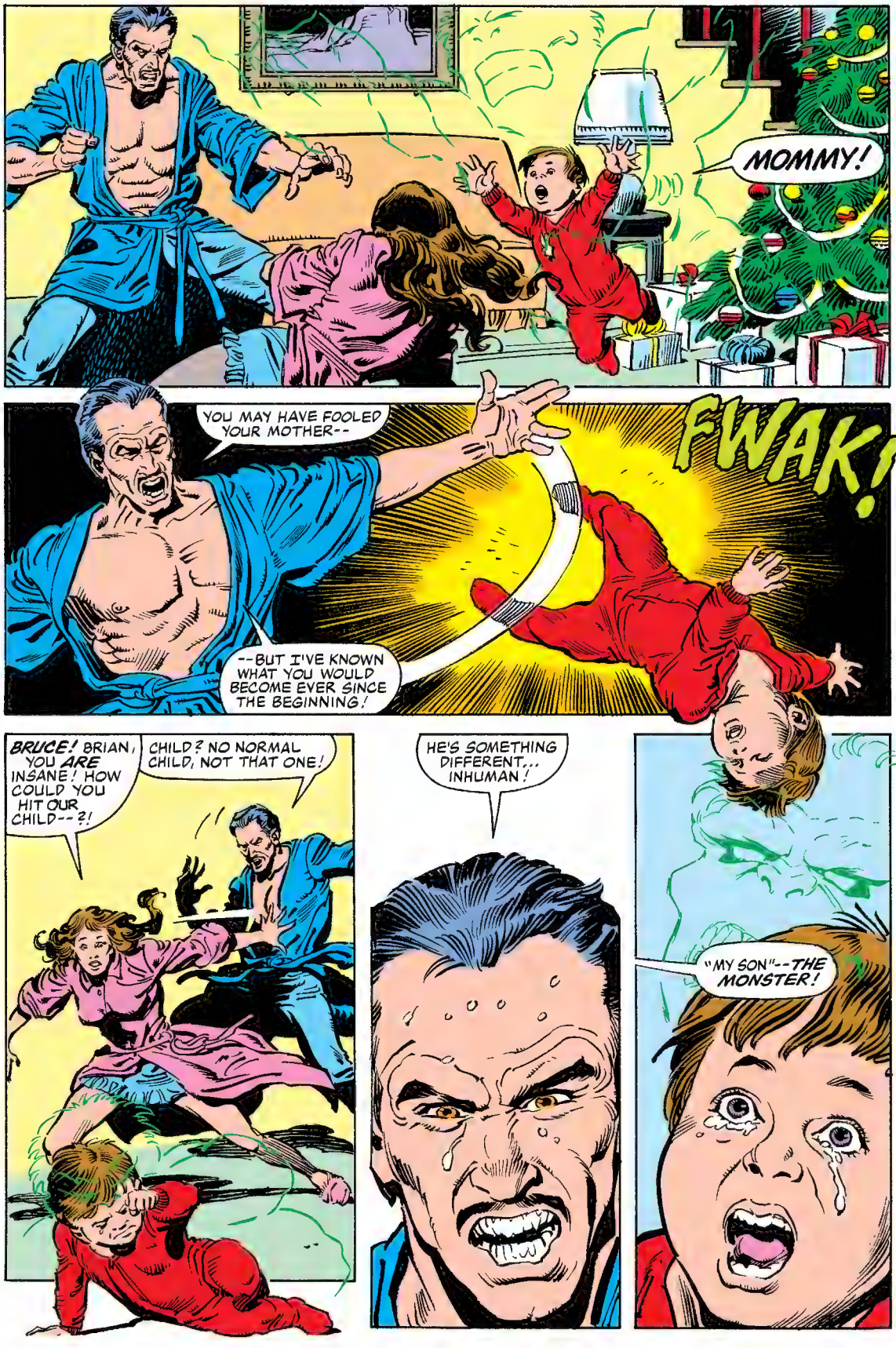
IT WAS SEVERAL MONTHS BEFORE THE BANNERS WERE ALLOWED TO BRING THEIR BABY HOME...
HOW BIG BRUCE HAS GROWN, BRIAN!
THEY HAD TO KEEP HIM IN INTENSIVE CARE, REBECCA -- TO STUDY HIM.
AND THEY FOUND NOTHING WRONG! WHY SHOULD THEY HAVE?
OUR BABY IS HAPPY, HEALTHY...
...AND HOME!
LOOK HOW ALERT HE IS -- HOW HE SMILES AT THE SHINING STAR-MOBILE I'VE HUNG OVER HIS CRIB!
LOOK HOW SHE FAWNS OVER HIM! ALL OF THAT TIME AND ATTENTION USED TO BE MINE--
--AND MINE ALONE!
WHY DON'T YOU EVER HOLD OUR SON, BRIAN?
COME, REBECCA. IT'S GETTING LATE. WE'VE THAT SYMPOSIUM TO ATTEND, AND LATER DINNER WITH THE BAXTERS.
BUT BRUCE HAS ONLY JUST BEEN RETURNED TO US! CAN'T WE STAY IN AND SPEND THE NIGHT WITH HIM?
THE SYMPOSIUM IS IMPORTANT TO MY CAREER. NURSE MEACHUM WILL SIT WITH BRUCE WHILE WE'RE OUT.
I WISH...
I'M SURE DR. BANNER KNOWS BEST, MA'AM!

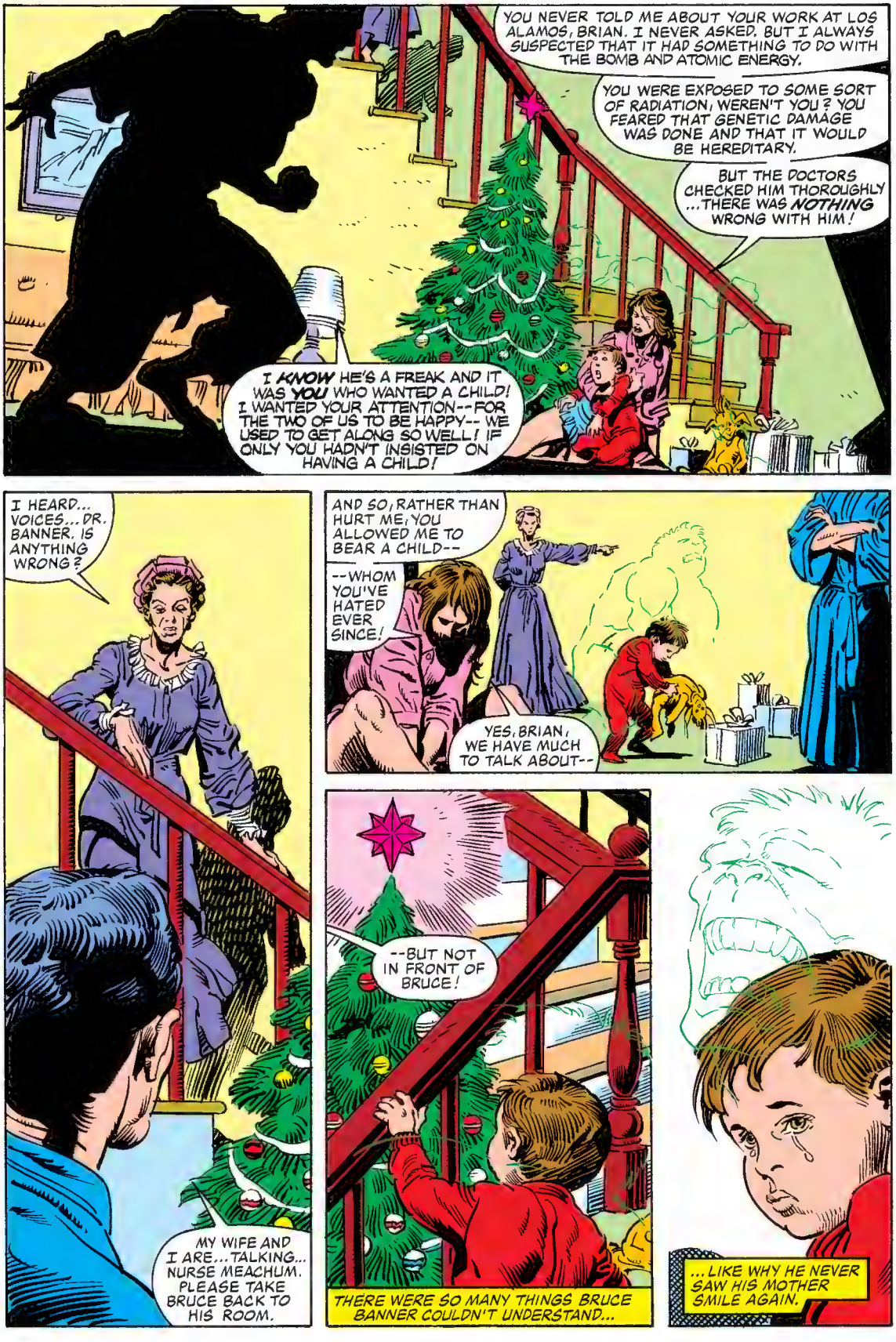

AND DON'T YOU WORRY! I'LL TAKE THE VERY BEST CARE OF BABY BRUCE!
THE BANNERS LEFT...
WAAAA
SHUT YOUR TRAP!
I DON'T WANT THIS JOB--I NEED THIS JOB!
BUT IF I'VE GOT TO STOOP TO MINDIN' OTHER PEOPLE'S BRATS--
--I EXPECT 'EM TO BE QUIET AND AMUSE THEMSELVES!
HERE! YOUR MOTHER LEFT YOU THIS DOLL!
PIPE DOWN AND PLAY!
AT AN AGE WHEN OTHER CHILDREN WERE LEARNING TO LAUGH, BRUCE BANNER LEARNED LONELINESS.
WHEN HIS MOTHER WAS THERE, IT WAS DIFFERENT.
BUT HIS FATHER ALLOWED HIS MOTHER TO BE THERE SO RARELY.
INSTINCTIVELY SHUNNING HIS LOATHSOME NURSE, THE CHILD SOUGHT SOLACE IN THE PLAY-THINGS HIS MOTHER PROVIDED FOR HIM.
THE SHIMMERING STAR THAT HUNG OVER HIS CRIB, DISPELLING HIS DARKNESS...
...AND THE BELOVED DOLL STOOD SENTRY AGAINST HIS SOLITUDE.

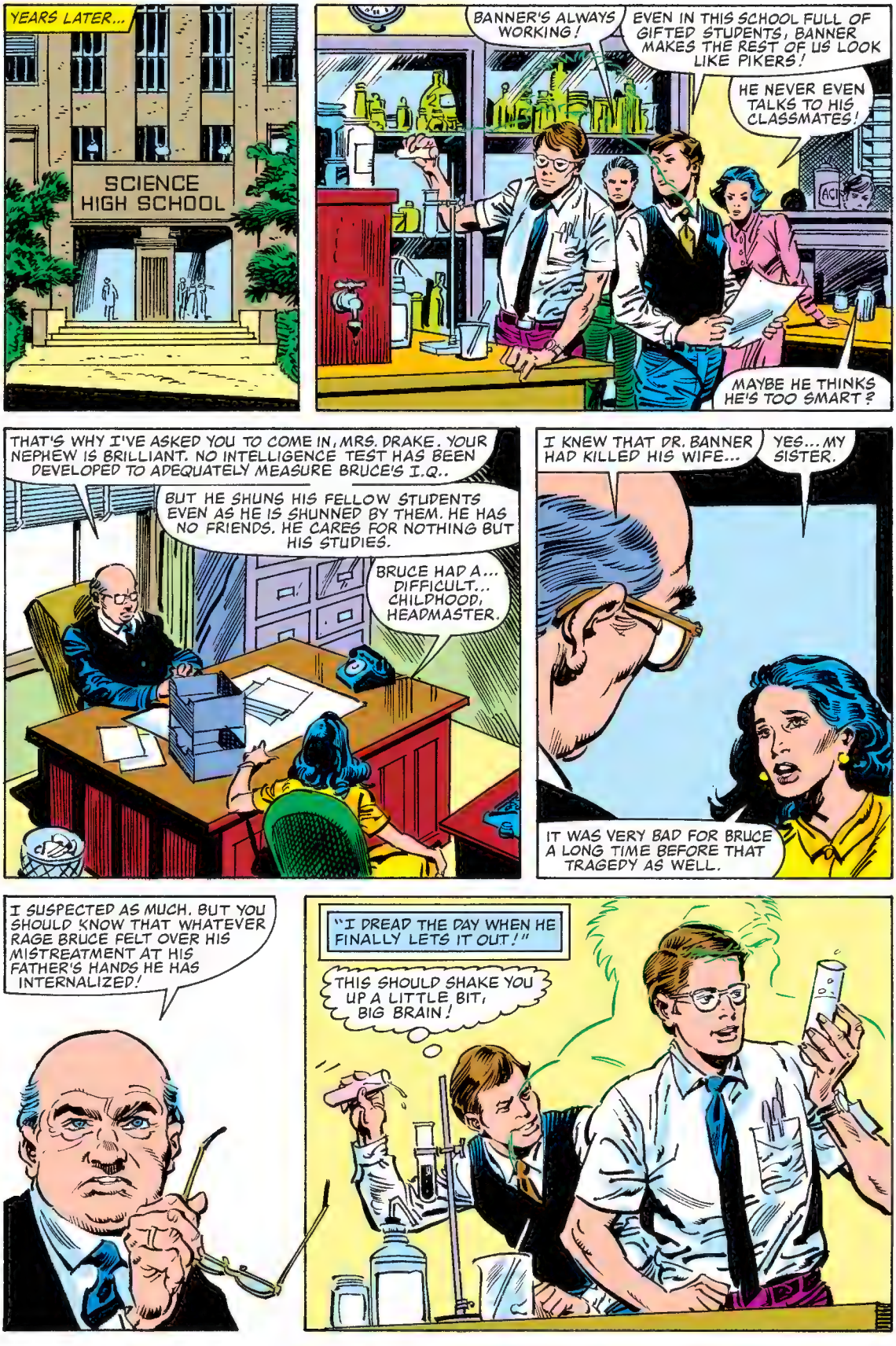
TIME PASSED, AS TIME DOES...
IT'S CHRISTMAS EVE, GUARDIAN--OUR FOURTH CHRISTMAS EVE! EVERYBODY'S SLEEPING--MOMMY, DADDY AND MEAN OLD NURSE!
IF WE'RE REAL QUIET, NO ONE'LL CATCH US SNEAKING DOWN TO SEE THE TREE!
OH, LOOK, GUARDIAN--THAT STAR! IT USED TO HANG OVER MY CRIB! MOMMY PUT IT THERE--BUT DADDY TOOK IT AWAY!
WE'RE SCARED OF THE DARK WITHOUT IT, AREN'T WE?
BUT IT'S SHINING NOW, LIGHTING UP THE WHOLE LIVING ROOM--
--AND I'M NOT SCARED... NOT WITH YOU HERE!
MOM
DAD
BRUCE
NOW YOU SIT, OKAY?
AND LET ME KNOW IF DADDY OR NURSE SHOULD COME!
IN THE CHILD'S MIND, THE LITTLE DOLL HAD GUARDED HIM AGAINST SADNESS FOR AS LONG AS BRUCE COULD REMEMBER, HENCE THE DOLL'S NAME...
WOW! THIS BIG BOX SAYS, "FROM MOMMY!" I WONDER WHAT'S IN IT, GUARDIAN!
I-I KNOW I SHOULDN'T OPEN IT YET, BUT...

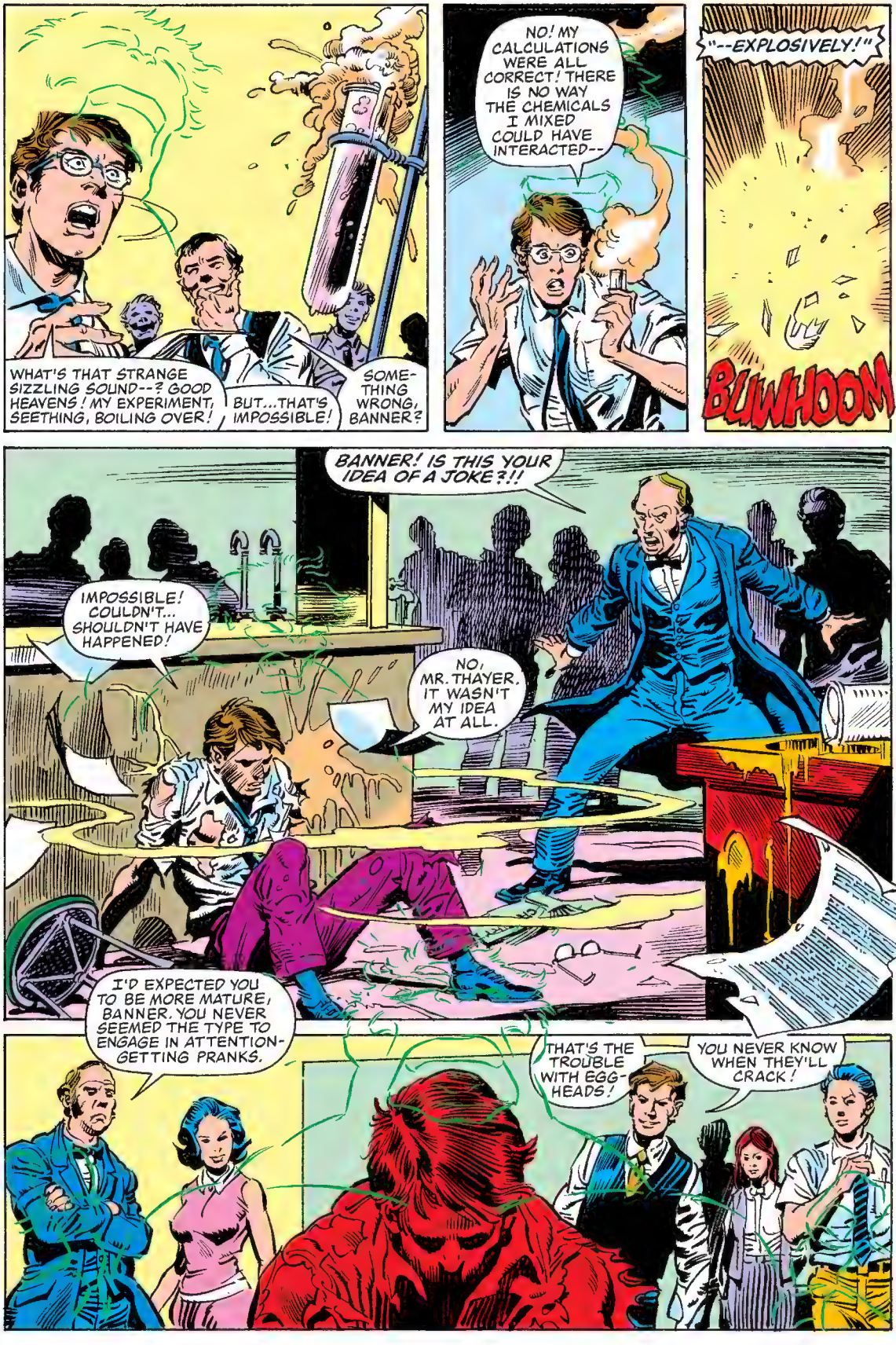

TEMPTATION PROVED TOO MUCH FOR THE LONELY FOUR YEAR OLD WHOSE CURIOSITY AND CREATIVITY WAS SO OFTEN SUPPRESSED...
SOME KIND OF BUILDING SET! I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT...!
AND YET, BRUCE BANNER MASTERED THE INTRICACIES OF AN ERECTOR SET IN A MATTER OF MINUTES.
HE LABORED BY THE LIGHT OF A STAR...
...WHILE HIS RAG DOLL STOOD GUARD OVER HIS HAPPINESS.
THERE! IT'S DONE! I WISH MOMMY COULD SEE IT! SHE'D BE SO PROUD OF ME...!
THUMP!
GUARDIAN! WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT MADE YOU FALL...?

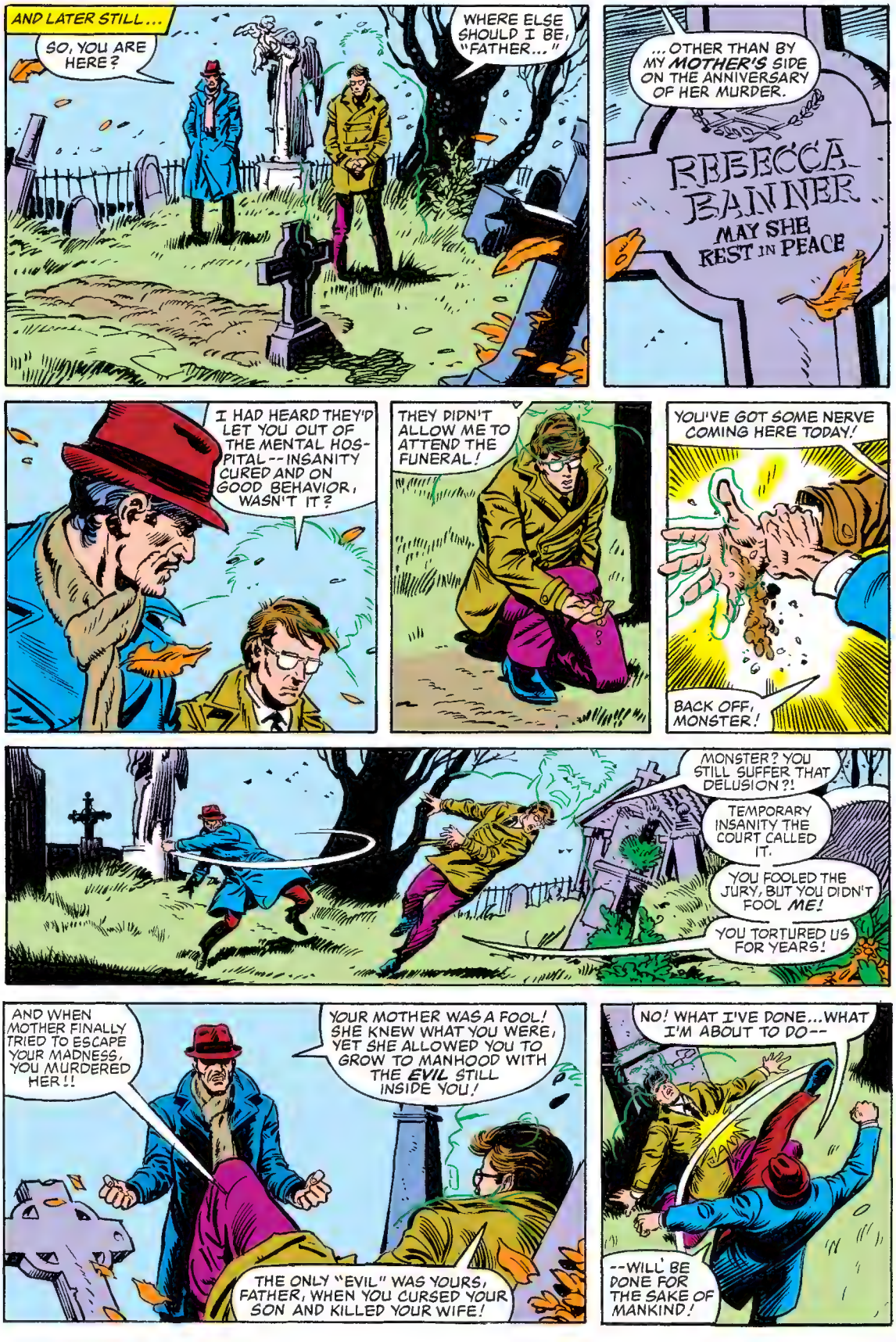
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF OF THIS, YOUNG MAN?!
D-DADDY! I WAS JUST BUILD-ING...!
NO CHILD YOUR AGE SHOULD BE ABLE TO BUILD SOMETHING SO INTRICATE!
NOW I UNDERSTAND! YOU MUST BE A FREAK AFTER ALL!
THE RADIATION DIDN'T AFFECT YOUR BODY -- IT'S YOUR MIND THAT IT ALTERED!
DADDY, Y-YOU'RE SCARING ME!
I SHOULD HAVE DIED YEARS AGO!
BUT IT'S NOT TOO LATE! I CAN DO IT... NOW... BEFORE YOU GROW TO MANHOOD... AND INTO AN EVEN BIGGER FREAK WHOSE UNNATURAL GENIUS MAKES YOU SUPERIOR TO WE "MERE MORTALS!"
BRIAN! WHY ARE YOU YELLING AT OUR SON?
H--HAVE YOU BEEN DRINKING AGAIN?
GO BACK TO BED, REBECCA! THAT... THAT THING ISN'T OUR "SON!"
HAVE YOU GONE MAD? I GAVE BIRTH TO BRUCE! HE GREW INSIDE MY BODY!
THE DAMAGE WAS DONE LONG BEFORE THEN!
THE FAULT WAS MINE, AND I INTEND TO CORRECT MY MISTAKE... NOW!
NO! I WON'T LET YOU HARM BRUCE--!
OHHH!
SLAP

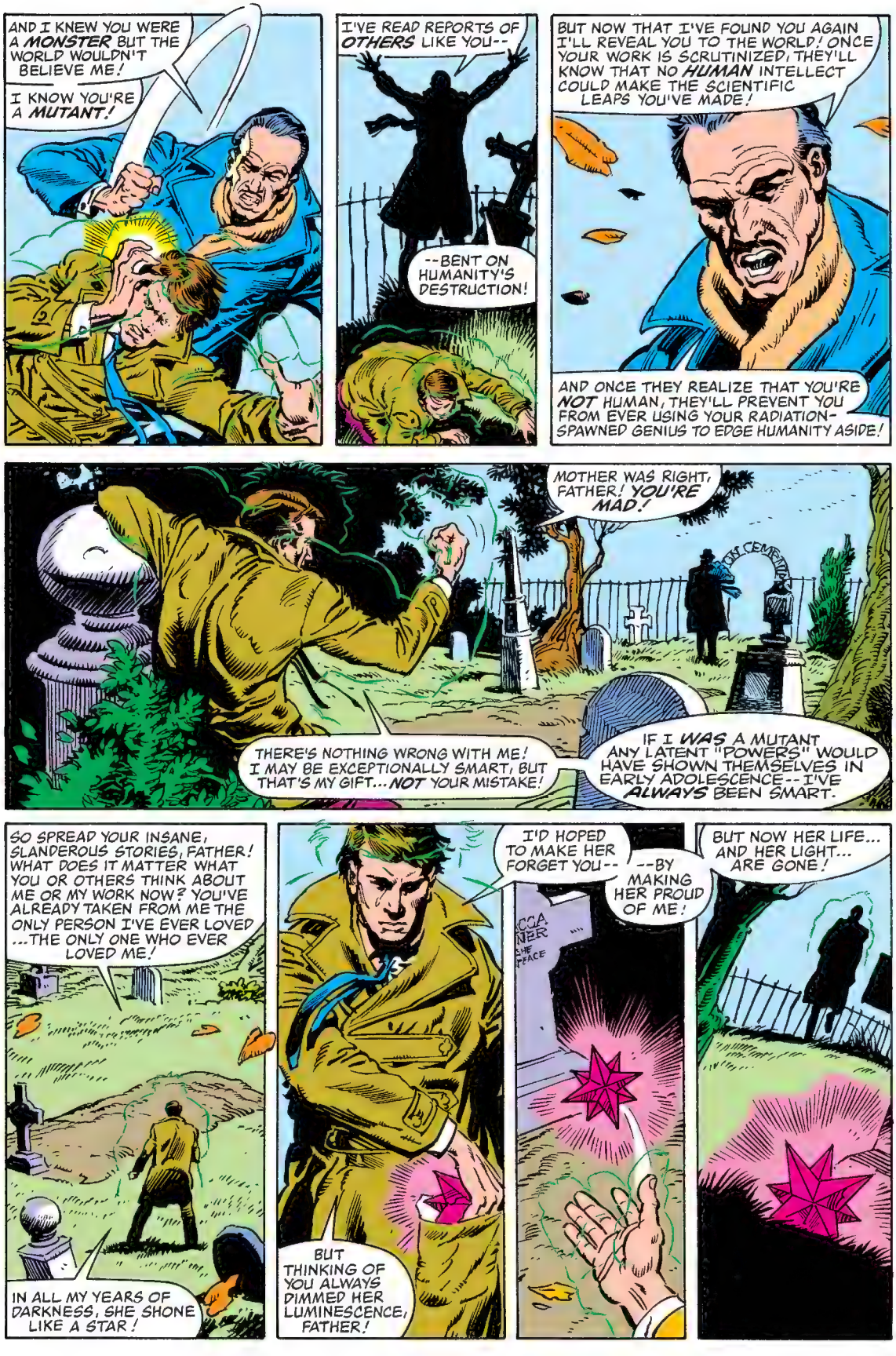

MOMMY!
YOU MAY HAVE FOOLED YOUR MOTHER--
FWAK!
--BUT I'VE KNOWN WHAT YOU WOULD BECOME EVER SINCE THE BEGINNING!
BRUCE! BRIAN, YOU ARE INSANE! HOW COULD YOU HIT OUR CHILD--?!
CHILD? NO NORMAL CHILD, NOT THAT ONE!
HE'S SOMETHING DIFFERENT... INHUMAN!
"MY SON"--THE MONSTER!

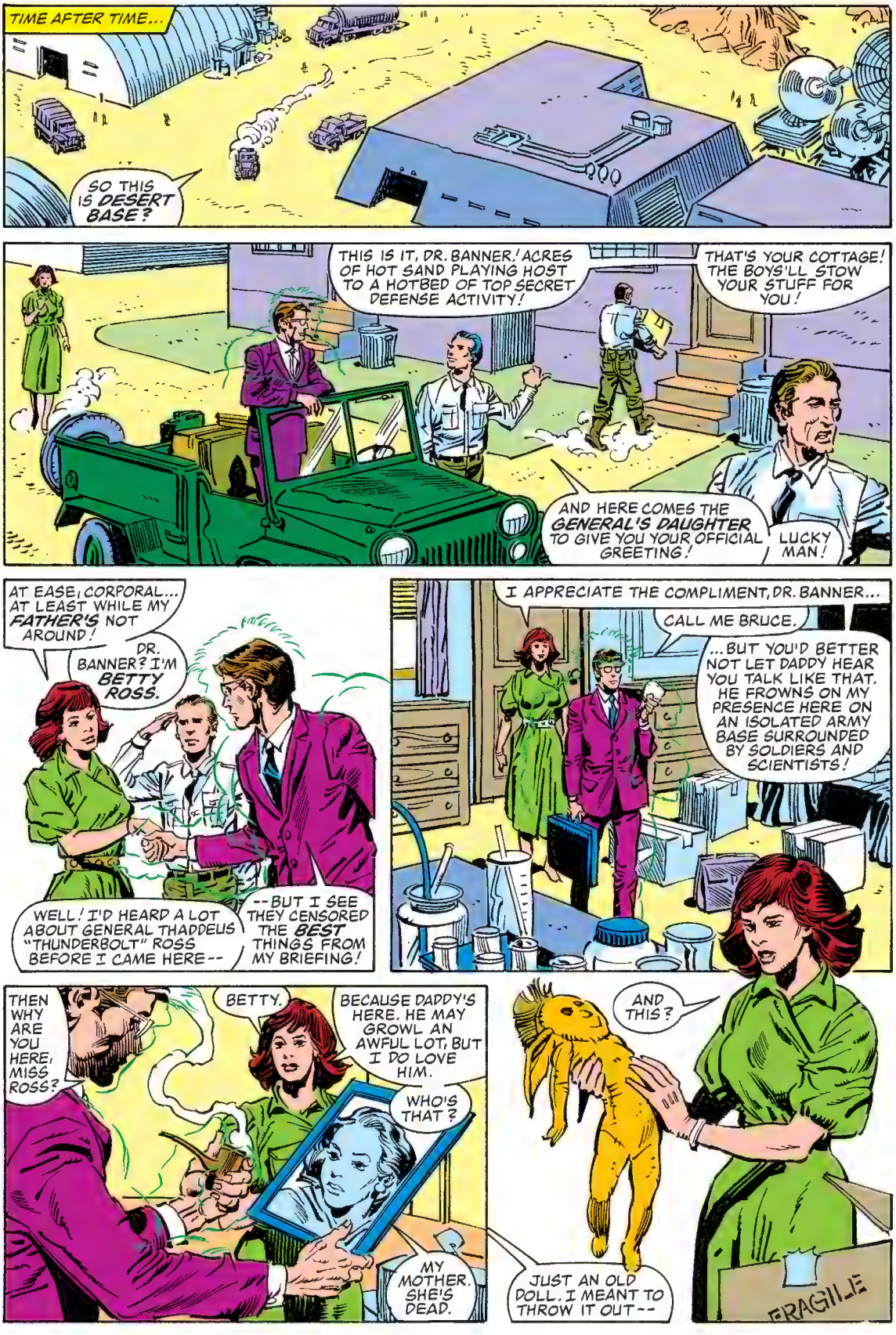

YOU NEVER TOLD ME ABOUT YOUR WORK AT LOS ALAMOS, BRIAN. I NEVER ASKED. BUT I ALWAYS SUSPECTED THAT IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE BOMB AND ATOMIC ENERGY.
YOU WERE EXPOSED TO SOME SORT OF RADIATION, WEREN'T YOU? YOU FEARED THAT GENETIC DAMAGE WAS DONE AND THAT IT WOULD BE HEREDITARY.
BUT THE DOCTORS CHECKED HIM THOROUGHLY ...THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH HIM!
I KNOW HE'S A FREAK AND IT WAS YOU WHO WANTED A CHILD! I WANTED YOUR ATTENTION--FOR THE TWO OF US TO BE HAPPY-- WE USED TO GET ALONG SO WELL! IF ONLY YOU HADN'T INSISTED ON HAVING A CHILD!
I HEARD... VOICES... DR. BANNER. IS ANYTHING WRONG?
MY WIFE AND I ARE... TALKING... NURSE MEACHUM. PLEASE TAKE BRUCE BACK TO HIS ROOM.
AND SO, RATHER THAN HURT ME, YOU ALLOWED ME TO BEAR A CHILD--
--WHOM YOU'VE HATED EVER SINCE!
YES, BRIAN, WE HAVE MUCH TO TALK ABOUT--
--BUT NOT IN FRONT OF BRUCE!
THERE WERE SO MANY THINGS BRUCE BANNER COULDN'T UNDERSTAND...
...LIKE WHY HE NEVER SAW HIS MOTHER SMILE AGAIN.


YEARS LATER...
SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL
BANNER'S ALWAYS WORKING!
EVEN IN THIS SCHOOL FULL OF GIFTED STUDENTS, BANNER MAKES THE REST OF US LOOK LIKE PIKERS!
HE NEVER EVEN TALKS TO HIS CLASSMATES!
MAYBE HE THINKS HE'S TOO SMART?
THAT'S WHY I'VE ASKED YOU TO COME IN, MRS. DRAKE. YOUR NEPHEW IS BRILLIANT. NO INTELLIGENCE TEST HAS BEEN DEVELOPED TO ADEQUATELY MEASURE BRUCE'S I.Q..
BUT HE SHUNS HIS FELLOW STUDENTS EVEN AS HE IS SHUNNED BY THEM. HE HAS NO FRIENDS. HE CARES FOR NOTHING BUT HIS STUDIES.
BRUCE HAD A... DIFFICULT... CHILDHOOD, HEADMASTER.
I KNEW THAT DR. BANNER HAD KILLED HIS WIFE...
YES... MY SISTER.
IT WAS VERY BAD FOR BRUCE A LONG TIME BEFORE THAT TRAGEDY AS WELL.
I SUSPECTED AS MUCH. BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT WHATEVER RAGE BRUCE FELT OVER HIS MISTREATMENT AT HIS FATHER'S HANDS HE HAS INTERNALIZED!
"I DREAD THE DAY WHEN HE FINALLY LETS IT OUT!"
THIS SHOULD SHAKE YOU UP A LITTLE BIT, BIG BRAIN!

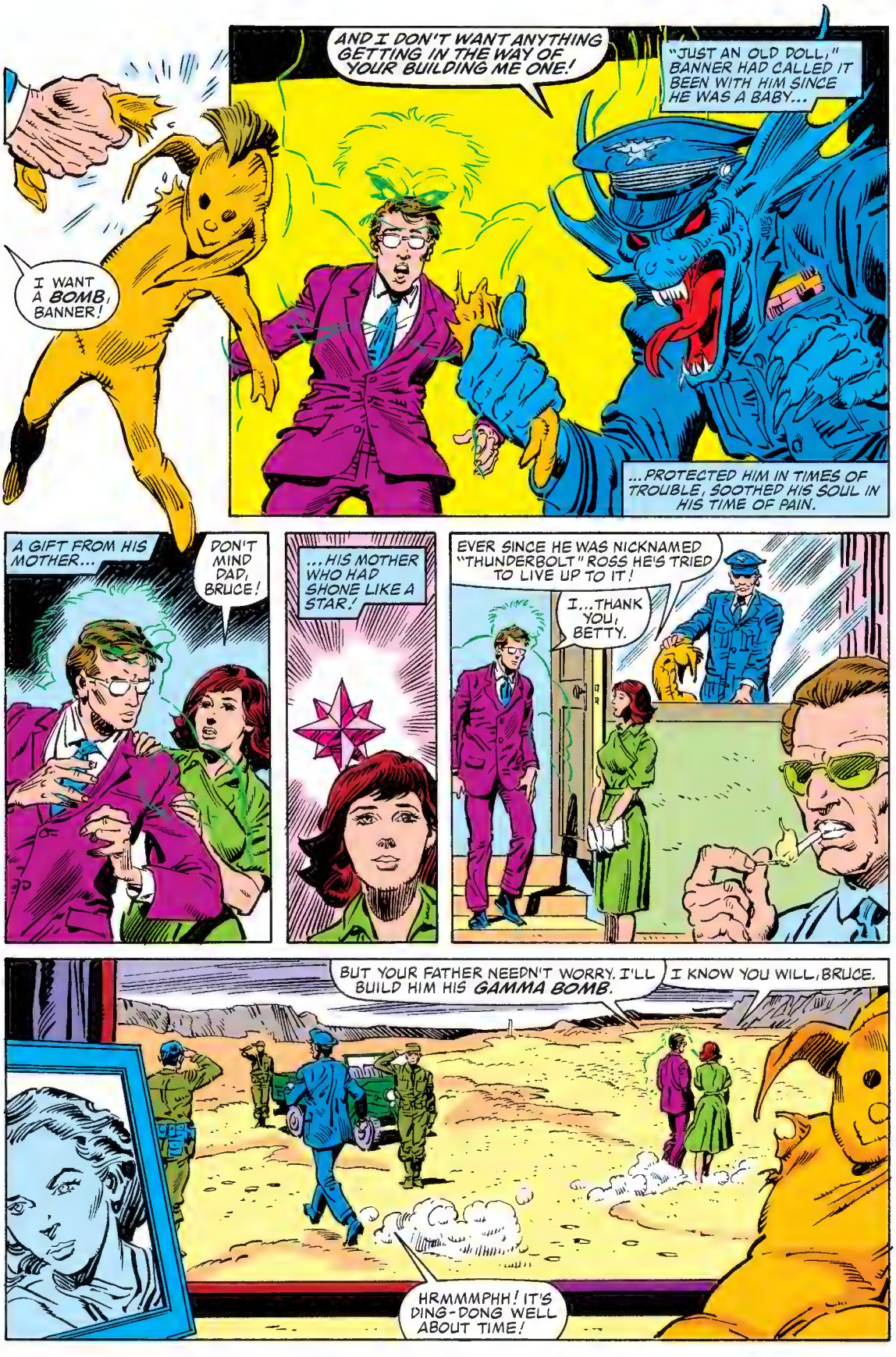

WHAT'S THAT STRANGE SIZZLING SOUND--? GOOD HEAVENS! MY EXPERIMENT, SEETHING, BOILING OVER!
BUT...THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
SOMETHING WRONG, BANNER?
NO! MY CALCULATIONS WERE ALL CORRECT! THERE IS NO WAY THE CHEMICALS I MIXED COULD HAVE INTERACTED--
"--EXPLOSIVELY!"
BLUWHOOM
BANNER! IS THIS YOUR IDEA OF A JOKE?!!
IMPOSSIBLE! COULDN'T... SHOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED!
NO, MR. THAYER. IT WASN'T MY IDEA AT ALL.
I'D EXPECTED YOU TO BE MORE MATURE, BANNER. YOU NEVER SEEMED THE TYPE TO ENGAGE IN ATTENTION-GETTING PRANKS.
THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH EGG-HEADS!
YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN THEY'LL CRACK!

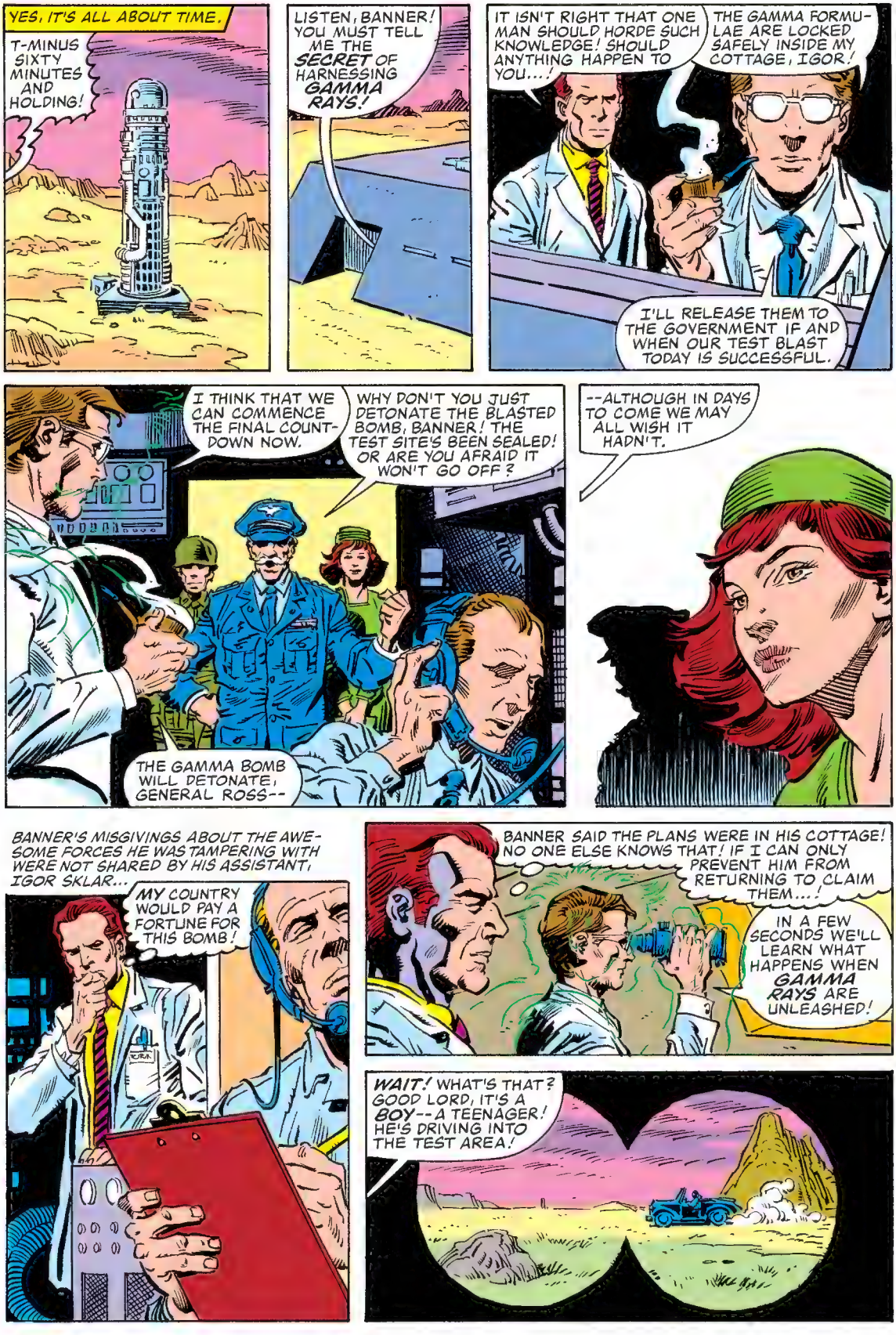

AND LATER STILL...
SO, YOU ARE HERE?
WHERE ELSE SHOULD I BE, "FATHER..."
...OTHER THAN BY MY MOTHER'S SIDE ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MURDER.
REBECCA BANNER
MAY SHE REST IN PEACE
I HAD HEARD THEY'D LET YOU OUT OF THE MENTAL HOSPITAL--INSANITY CURED AND ON GOOD BEHAVIOR, WASN'T IT?
THEY DIDN'T ALLOW ME TO ATTEND THE FUNERAL!
YOU'VE GOT SOME NERVE COMING HERE TODAY!
BACK OFF, MONSTER!
MONSTER? YOU STILL SUFFER THAT DELUSION?!
TEMPORARY INSANITY THE COURT CALLED IT.
YOU FOOLED THE JURY, BUT YOU DIDN'T FOOL ME!
YOU TORTURED US FOR YEARS!
AND WHEN MOTHER FINALLY TRIED TO ESCAPE YOUR MADNESS, YOU MURDERED HER!!
YOUR MOTHER WAS A FOOL! SHE KNEW WHAT YOU WERE, YET SHE ALLOWED YOU TO GROW TO MANHOOD WITH THE EVIL STILL INSIDE YOU!
THE ONLY "EVIL" WAS YOURS, FATHER, WHEN YOU CURSED YOUR SON AND KILLED YOUR WIFE!
NO! WHAT I'VE DONE...WHAT I'M ABOUT TO DO--
--WILL BE DONE FOR THE SAKE OF MANKIND!

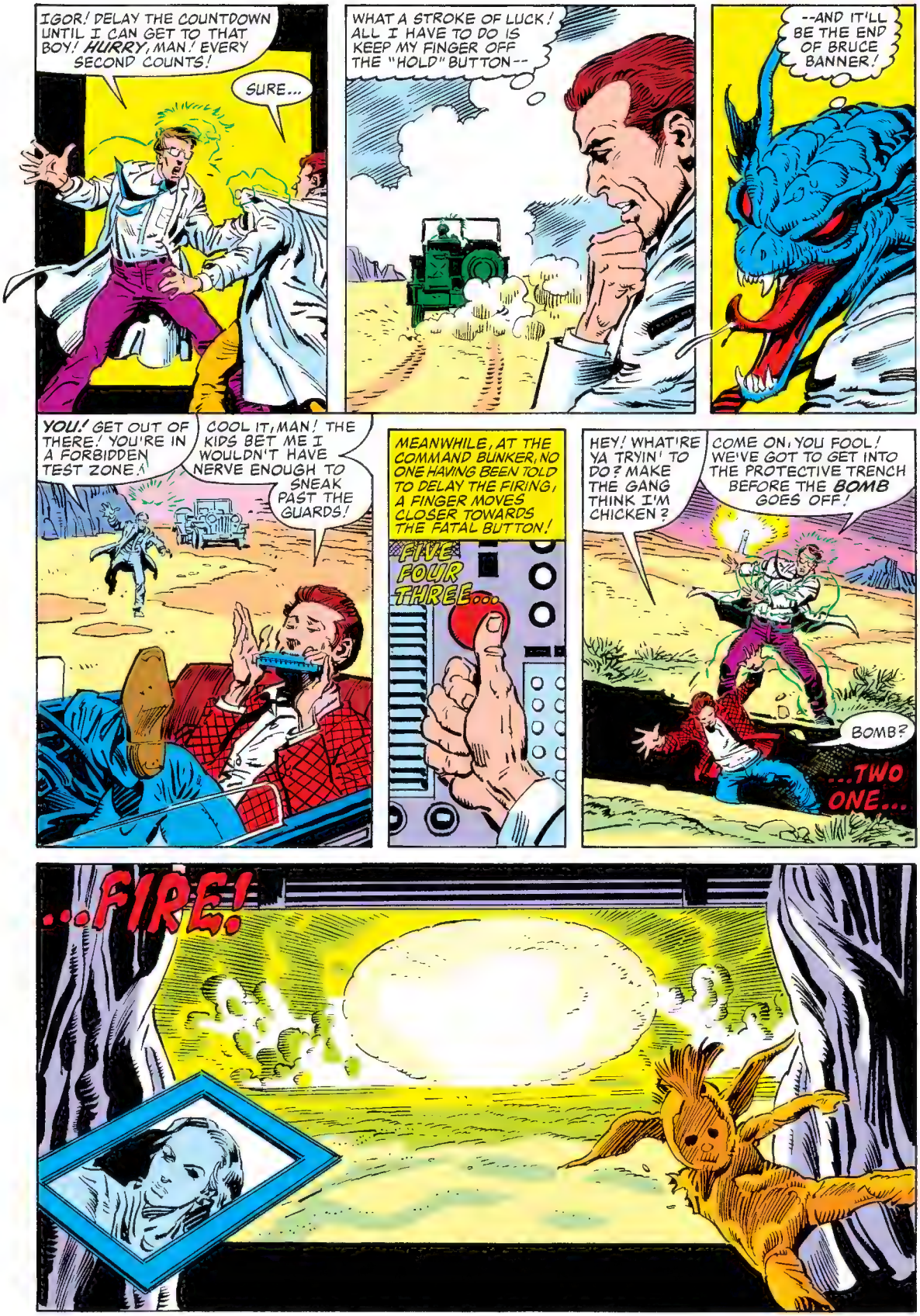

AND I KNEW YOU WERE A MONSTER BUT THE WORLD WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME!
I KNOW YOU'RE A MUTANT!
I'VE READ REPORTS OF OTHERS LIKE YOU--
--BENT ON HUMANITY'S DESTRUCTION!
BUT NOW THAT I'VE FOUND YOU AGAIN I'LL REVEAL YOU TO THE WORLD! ONCE YOUR WORK IS SCRUTINIZED, THEY'LL KNOW THAT NO HUMAN INTELLECT COULD MAKE THE SCIENTIFIC LEAPS YOU'VE MADE!
AND ONCE THEY REALIZE THAT YOU'RE NOT HUMAN, THEY'LL PREVENT YOU FROM EVER USING YOUR RADIATION-SPAWNED GENIUS TO EDGE HUMANITY ASIDE!
MOTHER WAS RIGHT, FATHER! YOU'RE MAD!
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ME! I MAY BE EXCEPTIONALLY SMART, BUT THAT'S MY GIFT... NOT YOUR MISTAKE!
IF I WAS A MUTANT ANY LATENT "POWERS" WOULD HAVE SHOWN THEMSELVES IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE-- I'VE ALWAYS BEEN SMART.
SO SPREAD YOUR INSANE, SLANDEROUS STORIES, FATHER! WHAT DOES IT MATTER WHAT YOU OR OTHERS THINK ABOUT ME OR MY WORK NOW? YOU'VE ALREADY TAKEN FROM ME THE ONLY PERSON I'VE EVER LOVED ...THE ONLY ONE WHO EVER LOVED ME!
IN ALL MY YEARS OF DARKNESS, SHE SHONE LIKE A STAR!
BUT THINKING OF YOU ALWAYS DIMMED HER LUMINESCENCE, FATHER!
I'D HOPED TO MAKE HER FORGET YOU--
--BY MAKING HER PROUD OF ME!
BUT NOW HER LIFE... AND HER LIGHT... ARE GONE!

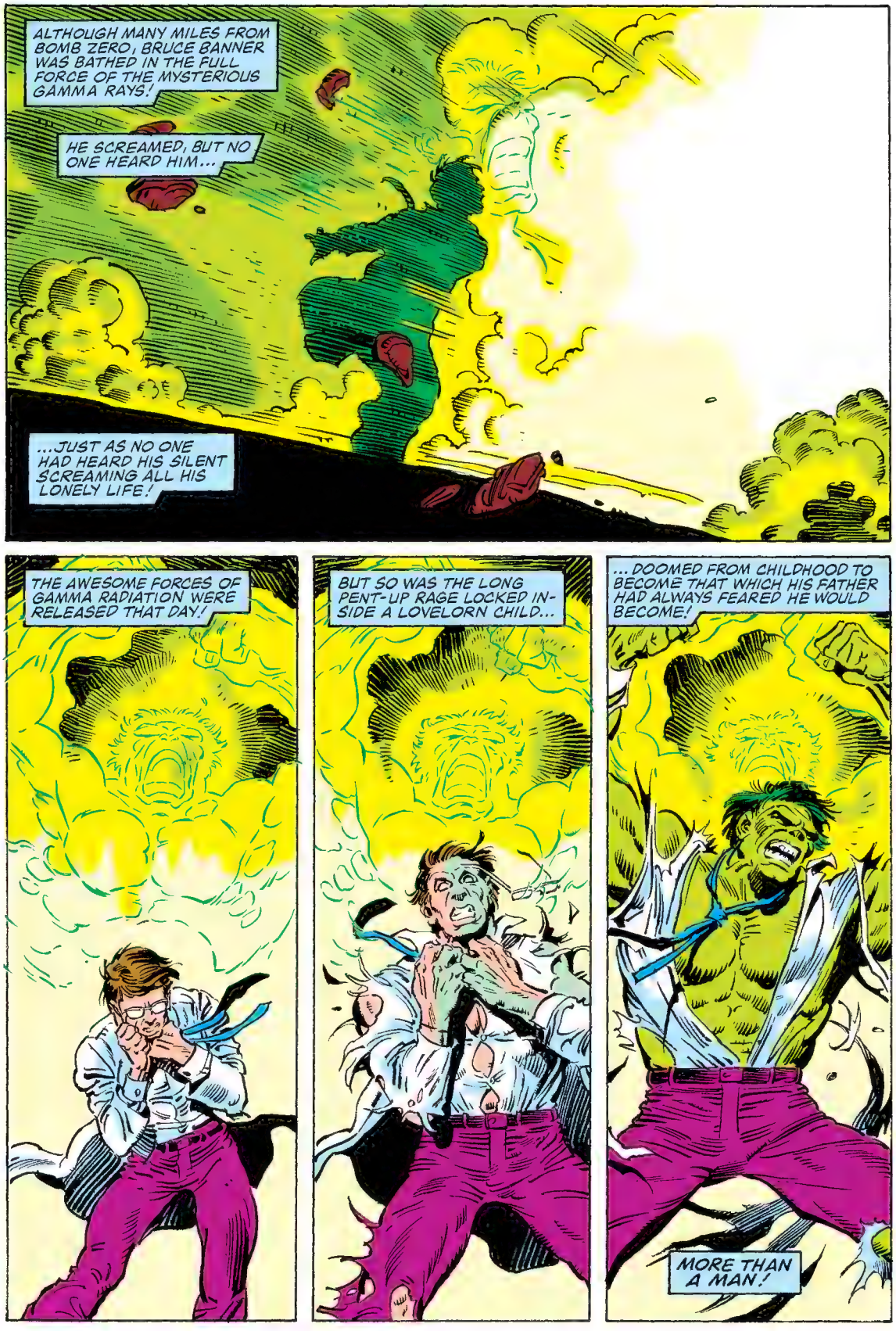

TIME AFTER TIME...
SO THIS IS DESERT BASE?
THIS IS IT, DR. BANNER! ACRES OF HOT SAND PLAYING HOST TO A HOTBED OF TOP SECRET DEFENSE ACTIVITY!
THAT'S YOUR COTTAGE! THE BOYS'LL STOW YOUR STUFF FOR YOU!
AND HERE COMES THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER TO GIVE YOU YOUR OFFICIAL GREETING!
LUCKY MAN!
AT EASE, CORPORAL... AT LEAST WHILE MY FATHER'S NOT AROUND!
DR. BANNER? I'M BETTY ROSS.
WELL! I'D HEARD A LOT ABOUT GENERAL THADDEUS "THUNDERBOLT" ROSS BEFORE I CAME HERE--
--BUT I SEE THEY CENSORED THE BEST THINGS FROM MY BRIEFING!
I APPRECIATE THE COMPLIMENT, DR. BANNER...
CALL ME BRUCE.
...BUT YOU'D BETTER NOT LET DADDY HEAR YOU TALK LIKE THAT. HE FROWNS ON MY PRESENCE HERE ON AN ISOLATED ARMY BASE SURROUNDED BY SOLDIERS AND SCIENTISTS!
THEN WHY ARE YOU HERE, MISS ROSS?
BETTY.
BECAUSE DADDY'S HERE. HE MAY GROWL AN AWFUL LOT, BUT I DO LOVE HIM.
WHO'S THAT?
MY MOTHER. SHE'S DEAD.
AND THIS?
JUST AN OLD DOLL. I MEANT TO THROW IT OUT--
FRAGILE

--BUT SOMEHOW FORGOT TO!
IT'S NICE TO HOLD ONTO OLD THINGS, OLD MEMORIES!
IS IT? I NEVER THOUGHT SO.
BETTY!
OH, HELLO, DADDY!
I WAS JUST WELCOMING DR. BANNER TO DESERT BASE!
I EXPECT MY AIDE DE CAMP TO PERFORM THAT FUNCTION, NOT MY DAUGHTER! STOP DISTRACTING THE MAN, BETTY, AND LET HIM GET TO WORK!
SURELY HE'S ALLOWED TO UNPACK FIRST, FATHER...
BLAST IT! THIS IS A MILITARY BASE, NOT A REST RANCH! THE PENTAGON GAVE ME A SCHEDULE, AND I INTEND TO STICK TO IT!
GENERAL, I AM AS EAGER TO GET THE GAMMA BOMB BUILT AS YOU ARE.
BUT I MUST REMIND YOU THAT WE ARE TAMPERING WITH POWERFUL FORCES. WE MUST PROCEED SLOWLY...
POWERFUL FORCES?! BAH! A BOMB IS A BOMB! BUT I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN--
--THAT THEY'D SEND ME A SIMPERING CIVILIAN INSTEAD OF A MILITARY MAN TO COMPLETE THIS PROJECT!
I KNEW YOUR FATHER AT LOS ALAMOS, BANNER! NOW THERE WAS A REAL MAN--!
THE JURY THAT FOUND HIM NOT GUILTY BY REASON OF INSANITY OF KILLING MY MOTHER HAD ANOTHER WORD FOR HIM, GENERAL...
...MURDERER!
OH, NO!
WELL, PERHAPS HE WAS TOO DEDICATED TO HIS WORK! MIGHT HAVE MADE HIM UNSTABLE! THAT'S ANOTHER REASON I'M WORRIED ABOUT YOU!
THIS PROJECT IS TOO BLASTED IMPORTANT TO BE JEAPORDIZED BY SOME MEWLING MILKSOP ALL TORN UP OVER THE PROBLEMS OF HIS PAST!

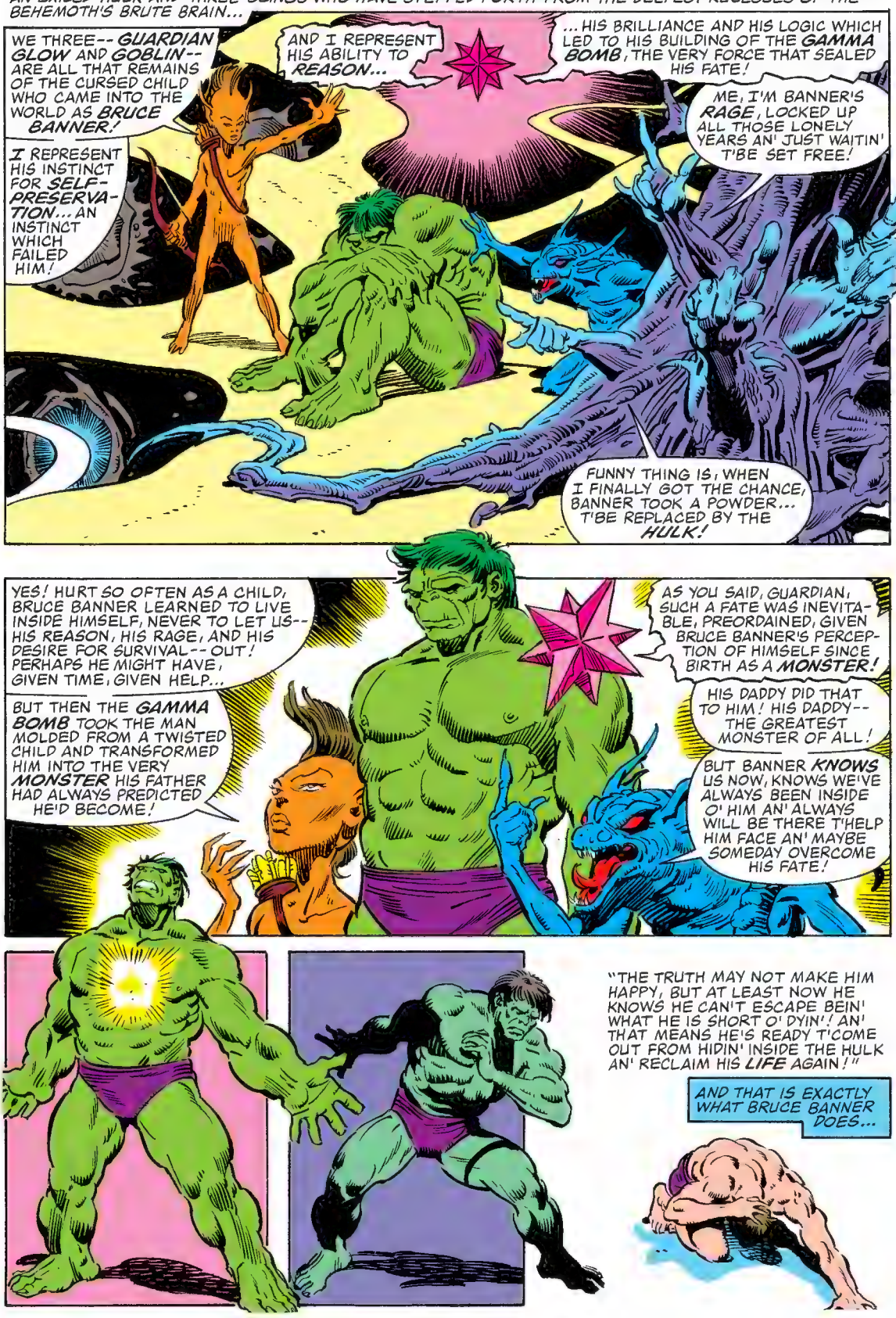

I WANT A BOMB, BANNER!
AND I DON'T WANT ANYTHING GETTING IN THE WAY OF YOUR BUILDING ME ONE!
"JUST AN OLD DOLL," BANNER HAD CALLED IT BEEN WITH HIM SINCE HE WAS A BABY...
...PROTECTED HIM IN TIMES OF TROUBLE, SOOTHED HIS SOUL IN HIS TIME OF PAIN.
A GIFT FROM HIS MOTHER...
DON'T MIND DAD, BRUCE!
...HIS MOTHER WHO HAD SHONE LIKE A STAR!
EVER SINCE HE WAS NICKNAMED "THUNDERBOLT" ROSS HE'S TRIED TO LIVE UP TO IT!
I...THANK YOU, BETTY.
BUT YOUR FATHER NEEDN'T WORRY. I'LL BUILD HIM HIS GAMMA BOMB.
I KNOW YOU WILL, BRUCE.
HRMMMPHH! IT'S DING-DONG WELL ABOUT TIME!

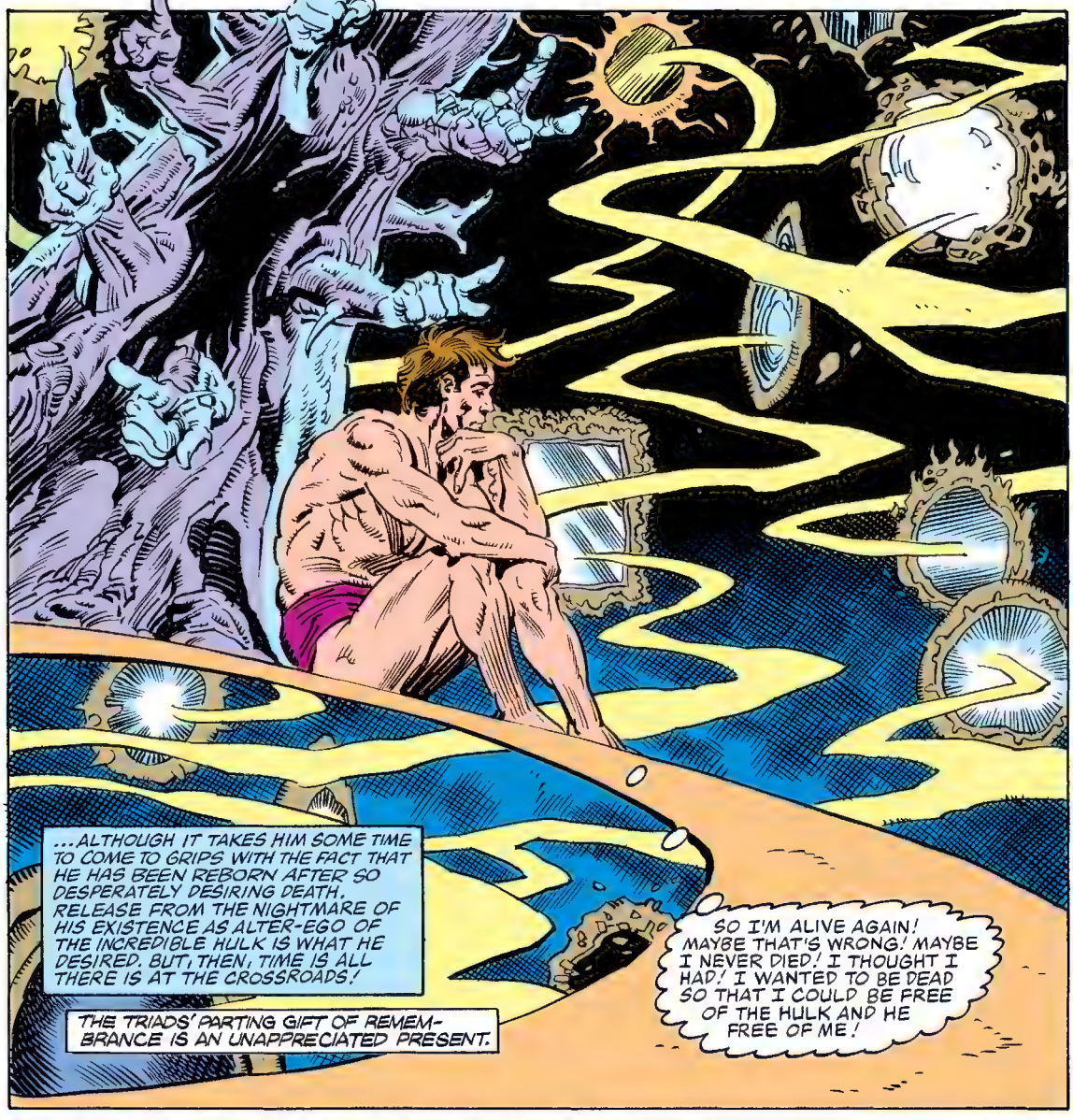

YES, IT'S ALL ABOUT TIME.
T-MINUS SIXTY MINUTES AND HOLDING!
LISTEN, BANNER! YOU MUST TELL ME THE SECRET OF HARNESSING GAMMA RAYS!
IT ISN'T RIGHT THAT ONE MAN SHOULD HORDE SUCH KNOWLEDGE! SHOULD ANYTHING HAPPEN TO YOU...!
THE GAMMA FORMULAE ARE LOCKED SAFELY INSIDE MY COTTAGE, IGOR!
I'LL RELEASE THEM TO THE GOVERNMENT IF AND WHEN OUR TEST BLAST TODAY IS SUCCESSFUL.
I THINK THAT WE CAN COMMENCE THE FINAL COUNTDOWN NOW.
WHY DON'T YOU JUST DETONATE THE BLASTED BOMB, BANNER! THE TEST SITE'S BEEN SEALED! OR ARE YOU AFRAID IT WON'T GO OFF?
THE GAMMA BOMB WILL DETONATE, GENERAL ROSS--
--ALTHOUGH IN DAYS TO COME WE MAY ALL WISH IT HADN'T.
BANNER'S MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE AWESOME FORCES HE WAS TAMPERING WITH WERE NOT SHARED BY HIS ASSISTANT, IGOR SKLAR...
MY COUNTRY WOULD PAY A FORTUNE FOR THIS BOMB!
BANNER SAID THE PLANS WERE IN HIS COTTAGE! NO ONE ELSE KNOWS THAT! IF I CAN ONLY PREVENT HIM FROM RETURNING TO CLAIM THEM...!
IN A FEW SECONDS WE'LL LEARN WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GAMMA RAYS ARE UNLEASHED!
WAIT! WHAT'S THAT? GOOD LORD, IT'S A BOY--A TEENAGER! HE'S DRIVING INTO THE TEST AREA!

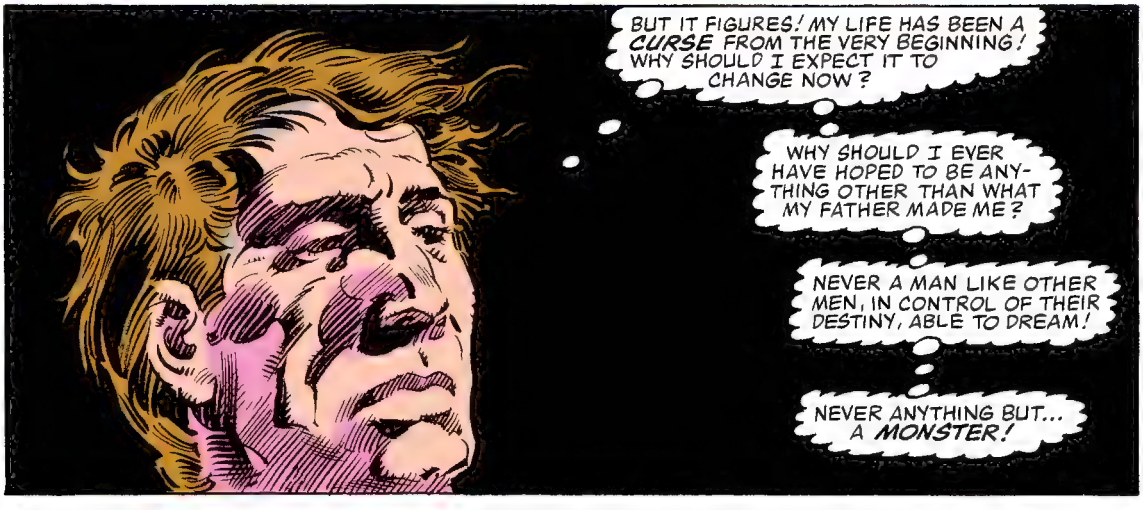

IGOR! DELAY THE COUNTDOWN UNTIL I CAN GET TO THAT BOY! HURRY, MAN! EVERY SECOND COUNTS!
SURE...
WHAT A STROKE OF LUCK! ALL I HAVE TO DO IS KEEP MY FINGER OFF THE "HOLD" BUTTON--
--AND IT'LL BE THE END OF BRUCE BANNER!
YOU! GET OUT OF THERE! YOU'RE IN A FORBIDDEN TEST ZONE!
COOL IT, MAN! THE KIDS BET ME I WOULDN'T HAVE NERVE ENOUGH TO SNEAK PAST THE GUARDS!
MEANWHILE, AT THE COMMAND BUNKER, NO ONE HAVING BEEN TOLD TO DELAY THE FIRING, A FINGER MOVES CLOSER TOWARDS THE FATAL BUTTON!
FIVE FOUR THREE...
HEY! WHAT'RE YA TRYIN' TO DO? MAKE THE GANG THINK I'M CHICKEN?
COME ON, YOU FOOL! WE'VE GOT TO GET INTO THE PROTECTIVE TRENCH BEFORE THE BOMB GOES OFF!
BOMB?
...TWO ONE...
...FIRE!


ALTHOUGH MANY MILES FROM BOMB ZERO, BRUCE BANNER WAS BATHED IN THE FULL FORCE OF THE MYSTERIOUS GAMMA RAYS!
HE SCREAMED, BUT NO ONE HEARD HIM...
...JUST AS NO ONE HAD HEARD HIS SILENT SCREAMING ALL HIS LONELY LIFE!
THE AWESOME FORCES OF GAMMA RADIATION WERE RELEASED THAT DAY!
BUT SO WAS THE LONG PENT-UP RAGE LOCKED INSIDE A LOVELORN CHILD...
...DOOMED FROM CHILDHOOD TO BECOME THAT WHICH HIS FATHER HAD ALWAYS FEARED HE WOULD BECOME!
MORE THAN A MAN!

A MONSTER!
BUT THAT WAS THEN.

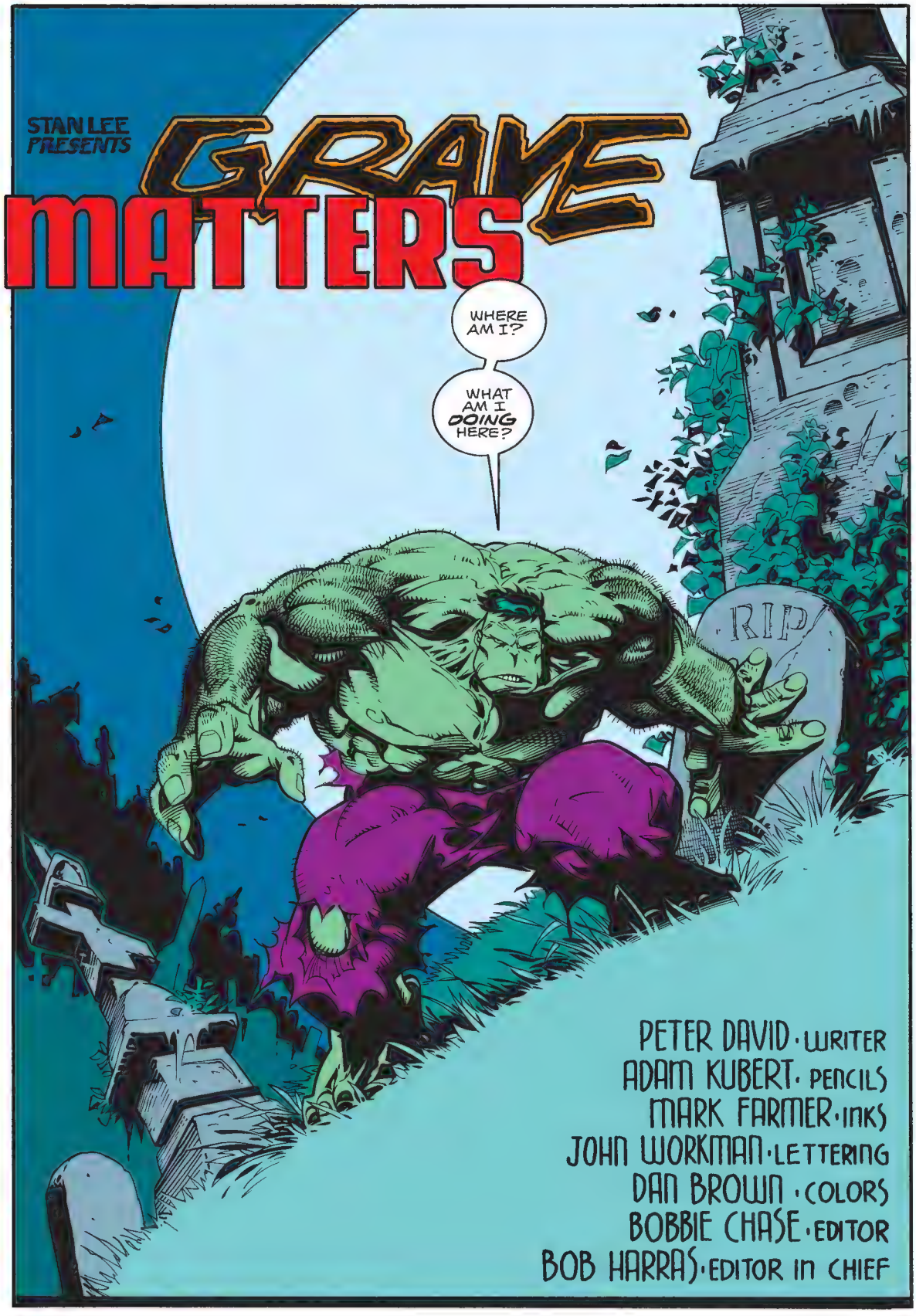

THE TIME: NOW. THE PLACE: AN INTERDIMENSIONAL INTERSECTION CALLED THE CROSSROADS. THE PLAYERS: AN EXILED HULK AND THREE BEINGS WHO HAVE STEPPED FORTH FROM THE DEEPEST RECESSES OF THE BEHEMOTH'S BRUTE BRAIN...
WE THREE-- GUARDIAN GLOW AND GOBLIN-- ARE ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE CURSED CHILD WHO CAME INTO THE WORLD AS BRUCE BANNER!
I REPRESENT HIS INSTINCT FOR SELF-PRESERVATION... AN INSTINCT WHICH FAILED HIM!
AND I REPRESENT HIS ABILITY TO REASON...
...HIS BRILLIANCE AND HIS LOGIC WHICH LED TO HIS BUILDING OF THE GAMMA BOMB, THE VERY FORCE THAT SEALED HIS FATE!
ME, I'M BANNER'S RAGE, LOCKED UP ALL THOSE LONELY YEARS AN' JUST WAITIN' T'BE SET FREE!
FUNNY THING IS, WHEN I FINALLY GOT THE CHANCE, BANNER TOOK A POWDER... T'BE REPLACED BY THE HULK!
YES! HURT SO OFTEN AS A CHILD, BRUCE BANNER LEARNED TO LIVE INSIDE HIMSELF, NEVER TO LET US-- HIS REASON, HIS RAGE, AND HIS DESIRE FOR SURVIVAL-- OUT! PERHAPS HE MIGHT HAVE, GIVEN TIME, GIVEN HELP...
BUT THEN THE GAMMA BOMB TOOK THE MAN MOLDED FROM A TWISTED CHILD AND TRANSFORMED HIM INTO THE VERY MONSTER HIS FATHER HAD ALWAYS PREDICTED HE'D BECOME!
AS YOU SAID, GUARDIAN, SUCH A FATE WAS INEVITABLE, PREORDAINED, GIVEN BRUCE BANNER'S PERCEPTION OF HIMSELF SINCE BIRTH AS A MONSTER!
HIS DADDY DID THAT TO HIM! HIS DADDY-- THE GREATEST MONSTER OF ALL!
BUT BANNER KNOWS US NOW, KNOWS WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN INSIDE O' HIM AN' ALWAYS WILL BE THERE T'HELP HIM FACE AN' MAYBE SOMEDAY OVERCOME HIS FATE!
"THE TRUTH MAY NOT MAKE HIM HAPPY, BUT AT LEAST NOW HE KNOWS HE CAN'T ESCAPE BEIN' WHAT HE IS SHORT O' DYIN'! AN' THAT MEANS HE'S READY T'COME OUT FROM HIDIN' INSIDE THE HULK AN' RECLAIM HIS LIFE AGAIN!"
AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT BRUCE BANNER DOES...


...ALTHOUGH IT TAKES HIM SOME TIME TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE FACT THAT HE HAS BEEN REBORN AFTER SO DESPERATELY DESIRING DEATH, RELEASE FROM THE NIGHTMARE OF HIS EXISTENCE AS ALTER-EGO OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK IS WHAT HE DESIRED. BUT, THEN, TIME IS ALL THERE IS AT THE CROSSROADS!
THE TRIADS' PARTING GIFT OF REMEMBRANCE IS AN UNAPPRECIATED PRESENT.
SO I'M ALIVE AGAIN! MAYBE THAT'S WRONG! MAYBE I NEVER DIED! I THOUGHT I HAD! I WANTED TO BE DEAD SO THAT I COULD BE FREE OF THE HULK AND HE FREE OF ME!


BUT IT FIGURES! MY LIFE HAS BEEN A CURSE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING! WHY SHOULD I EXPECT IT TO CHANGE NOW?
WHY SHOULD I EVER HAVE HOPED TO BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN WHAT MY FATHER MADE ME?
NEVER A MAN LIKE OTHER MEN, IN CONTROL OF THEIR DESTINY, ABLE TO DREAM!
NEVER ANYTHING BUT... A MONSTER!

BRUCE.
LITTLE BRUCE. THE MONSTER.
HE DID THIS.
GREW INSIDE HER, LIKE THE CANCER HE WAS. PUSHED HER AWAY FROM ME.
HE KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING.
HE KNEW WHAT I'D...
KRISHH
HE KNEW. THAT HIDEOUS BRAIN OF HIS... HE KNEW.
EVERY STEP OF THE WAY, HE--
HEY!
THAT'S SOMEONE'S FINAL RESTING PLACE, BUDDY!

LET'S HAVE A LITTLE RESPECT FOR THE DEAD, SHALL WE?
GOD--
HA! NO, LET'S NOT PRETEND I'M HIM.
QUITE THE REVERSE...
NO, I MEAN--YOU STARTLED ME--
I STARTLED YOU? YOU'RE ON MY TURF, FRIEND.
AND MAKING AN UNGODLY MESS OF IT, I MIGHT ADD.
LOOK, IF YOU MEAN THIS TRASH SOMEONE LEFT ON MY WIFE'S GRAVE--
IT WAS ALREADY HERE WHEN...
WHEN I...
WHAT... WHAT IS THAT?
ON THE GRAVE.
Y'KNOW... THERE WAS ANOTHER GUY WHO TENDED THESE PLOTS ONCE. HE HAD A STORY ABOUT THIS.
HOW'D IT GO AGAIN...?


STAN LEE PRESENTS
GRAVE MATTERS
WHERE AM I?
WHAT AM I DOING HERE?
R.I.P.
PETER DAVID · WRITER
ADAM KUBERT · PENCILS
MARK FARMER · INKS
JOHN WORKMAN · LETTERING
DAN BROWN · COLORS
BOBBIE CHASE · EDITOR
BOB HARRAS · EDITOR IN CHIEF

HUNH. THOUGHT I HEARD DIGGING.

YOU.
WHERE IS THIS PLACE?

AH! I WAS WONDERING WHEN YOU'D GET HERE!
SO...WHAT'S THE LAST THING YOU REMEMBER?
COLLAPSING.
RIGHT. IN THE SAVAGE LAND. AND NOW YOU'RE EN ROUTE TO NEW YORK.
IS...THIS A DREAM?
NOPE. A STORY...AND A TRUE ONE... ALL ABOUT YOU.
AND YOU'LL ...TELL IT?
ME? NAH! I HAVEN'T TOLD ONE OF YOUR STORIES IN AGES.
BUT DON'T WORRY! I HAVE...
...HELP!
SNAP!

HURRY! WE'RE ON!
FINALLY, A CALL TO ACTION!

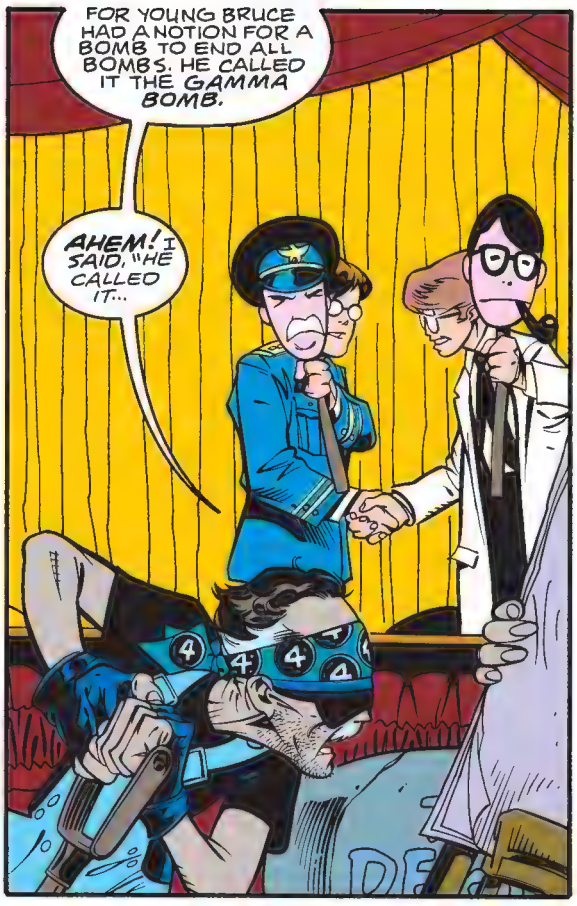
PLACES, PEOPLE, PLACES!
AND NOW STAN LEE PRESENTS (AS I MODESTLY LIKE TO SHOUT)...
...A MEMORY PLAY WE LIKE TO CALL...

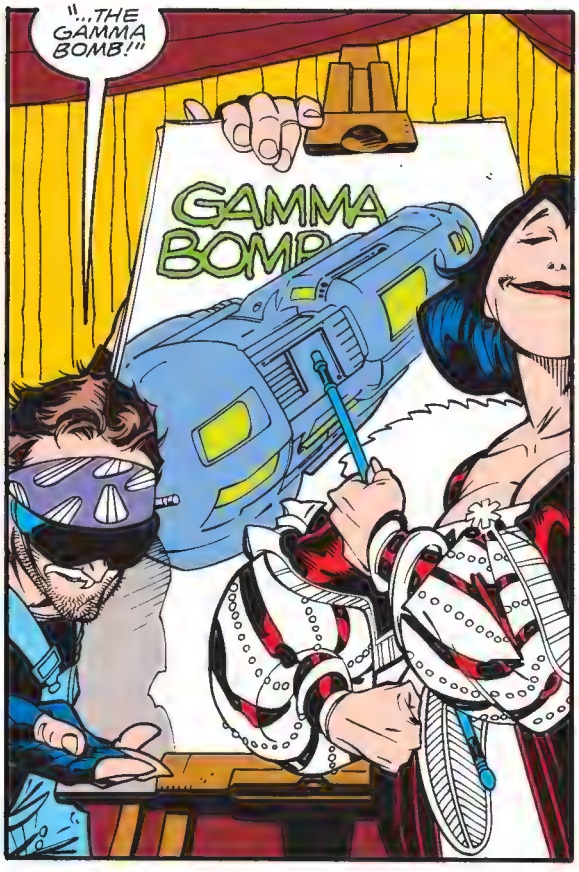
...THE DEATH...
...OF BRIAN...
THE DEATH OF BRIAN BANNER
...BANNER!

...OR... BRUCE AND HIS FATHER FIGURES!
NO! GO AWAY! DON'T WANT TO HEAR THIS!
TOO LATE, MEAN GREEN!

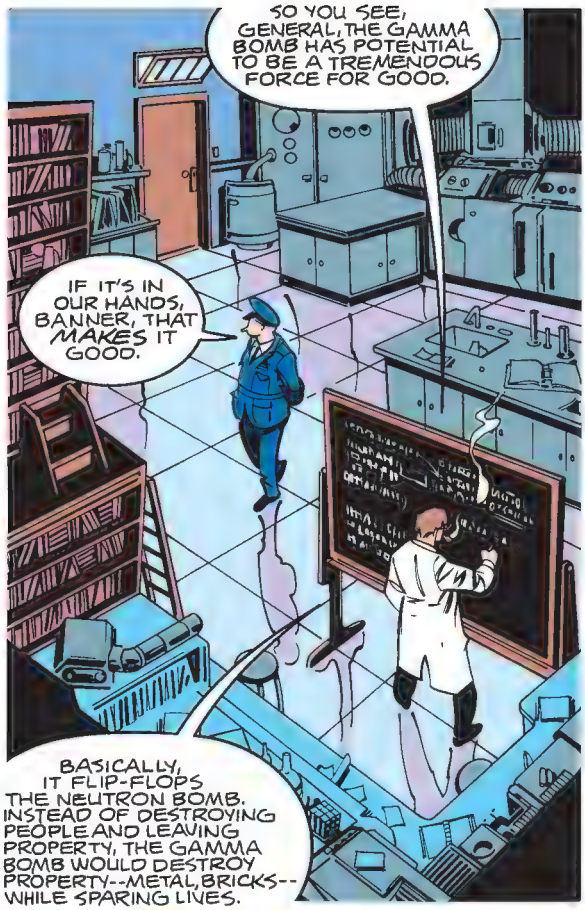
YOU'VE PUT IT OFF LONG ENOUGH. YOU'VE HEARD BITS AND PIECES OF IT.
NOW IT'S TIME TO HEAR THE WHOLE THING, SO SETTLE DOWN, BIG GUY!
KIRBY THEATER
OKAY! ONCE UPON A TIME... THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN NAMED...
THE DEATH OF BRIAN BANNER
...ROBERT BRUCE!
YOU HAVE BLED WITH WALLACE! NOW BLEED WITH ME!
THE DEATH
NOT THAT ROBERT BRUCE, CHEESEHEAD! ROBERT BRUCE BANNER!
FWiiiiiP!!!
CAN'T GET ANY DECENT HELP THESE DAYS.
THE DEATH

NOW, ROBERT BRUCE WAS JUST OUT OF COLLEGE AND ALREADY HAD A REP FOR BRILLIANCE. SO MUCH SO THAT IT HAD ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF THE MILITARY.
AND A GENTLEMAN WAS SENT TO MEET HIM.
HI, MOM.
A GENT NAMED... THUNDERBOLT ROSS!

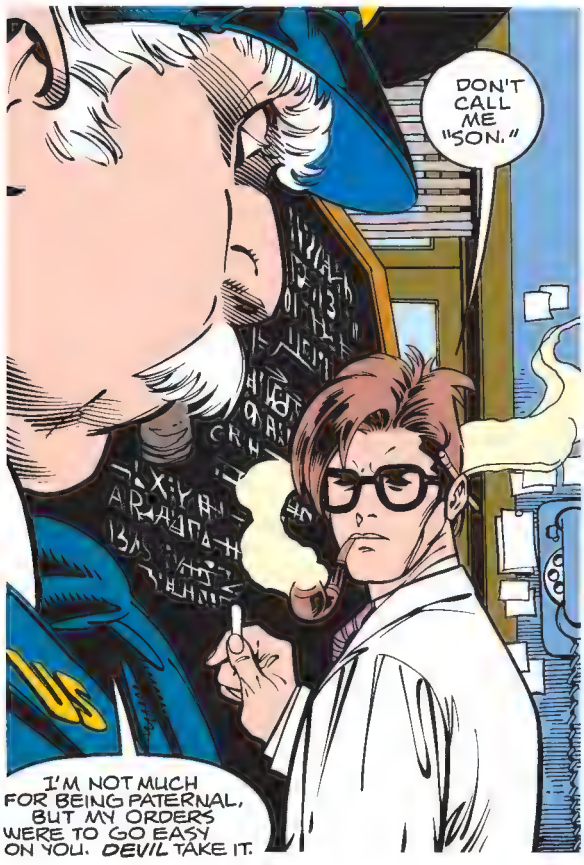

FOR YOUNG BRUCE HAD A NOTION FOR A BOMB TO END ALL BOMBS. HE CALLED IT THE GAMMA BOMB.
AHEM! I SAID, "HE CALLED IT...


"...THE GAMMA BOMB!"
GAMMA BOMB

AND ROSS WAS THERE TO FIND OUT ALL ABOUT IT.


SO YOU SEE, GENERAL, THE GAMMA BOMB HAS POTENTIAL TO BE A TREMENDOUS FORCE FOR GOOD.
IF IT'S IN OUR HANDS, BANNER, THAT MAKES IT GOOD.
BASICALLY, IT FLIP-FLOPS THE NEUTRON BOMB. INSTEAD OF DESTROYING PEOPLE AND LEAVING PROPERTY, THE GAMMA BOMB WOULD DESTROY PROPERTY--METAL, BRICKS--WHILE SPARING LIVES.

IMAGINE AN ENEMY FINDING ITSELF BEREFT OF GUNS, TANKS, ARMAMENT. OR SURGICAL STRIKES DESTROYING MILITARY TARGETS AND SPARING SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS.
TAP TAP TAP
LOOK, SON, I...


DON'T CALL ME "SON."
I'M NOT MUCH FOR BEING PATERNAL, BUT MY ORDERS WERE TO GO EASY ON YOU. DEVIL TAKE IT.

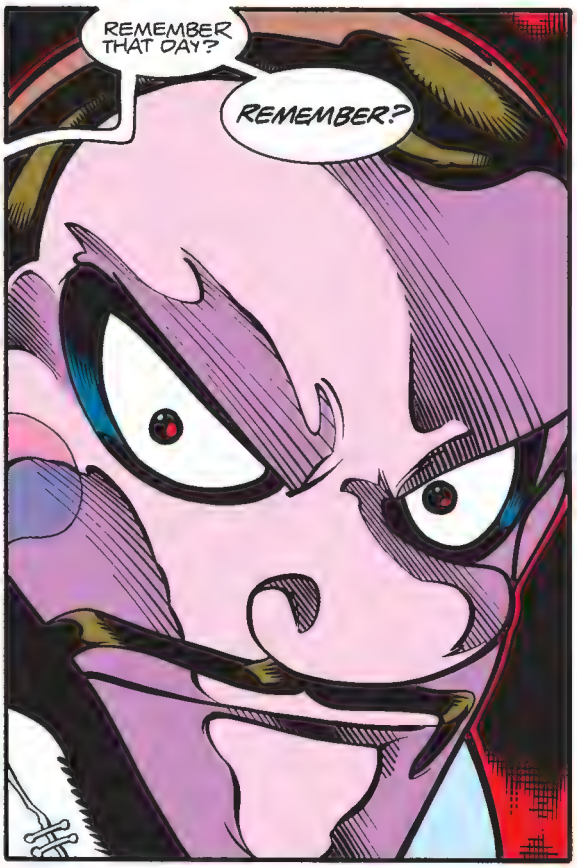
BOTTOM LINE, I DON'T NEED SOME NAMBY-PAMBY FEEL-GOOD "SAFE" WEAPON. I NEED SOMETHING TO PUT THE FEAR OF GOD INTO THE ENEMY.
THE FEAR OF GOD, GENERAL, OR THE FEAR OF YOU?
SAME DIFFERENCE.
THEY CALL ME "THUNDERBOLT," BANNER, BECAUSE WHEN I'M ANGRY...

...IT'S LIKE ZEUS THROWING THUNDERBOLTS FROM ON HIGH.
REMIND ME TO BE IMPRESSED, GENERAL.
THE GOVERNMENT WANTS YOU TO CREATE A LOCALIZED, DE-STRUCTIVE BOMB. YOU'LL BE PAID FAR MORE THAN IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR OR AS A TEACHER.
QUESTION IS, ARE YOU MAN ENOUGH TO TAKE THE CONTRACT?
MAN ENOUGH OR SOUL-LESS ENOUGH?
EXCUSE ME.
YES, HELLO.
YES, THIS IS DOCTOR BANNER.
BRUCE, THIS IS...
...THIS IS YOUR DAD.

I DON'T WANT TO SEE HIM ...OR HEAR ABOUT HIM.

I'M NOT SURPRISED! WHY, THE LAST PLACE YOU SAW HIM WAS A PLACE JUST LIKE THIS!
BRIAN BANNER, THE MAN WHO KILLED YOUR MOM ...THE MAN YOU TRIED TO COVER FOR AT THE TRIAL...
KA-ZAR
KA-ZAR

ALMOST WORKED, TOO...UNTIL HE WAS OVERHEARD GLOATING ABOUT HOW HE'D BROW-BEAT YOU INTO LYING.
WHACK
WHACK

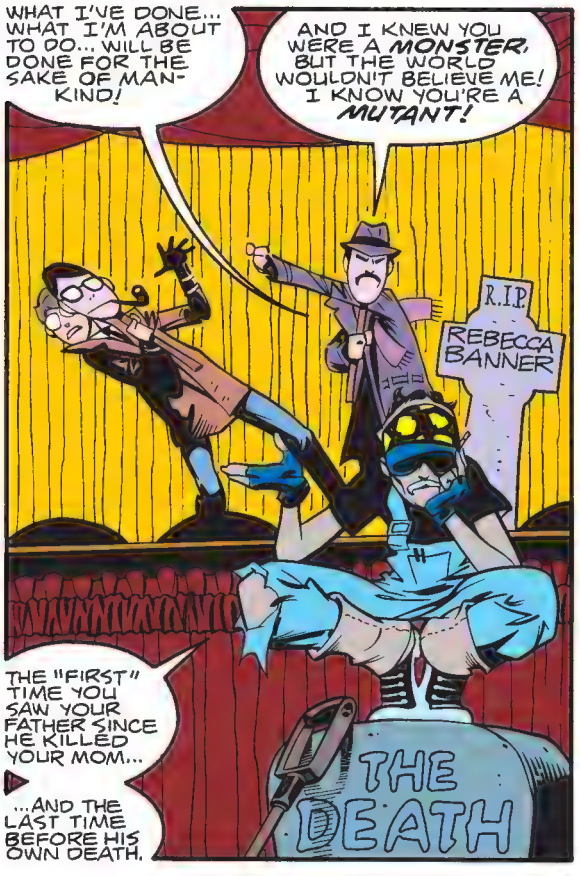

REMEMBER THAT DAY?
REMEMBER?

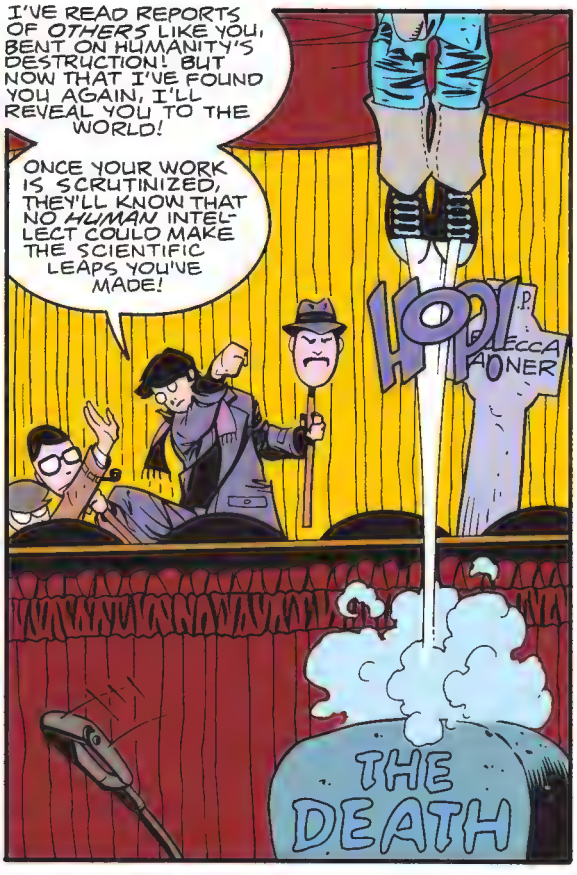
REMEMBER THAT I'LL GET YOU! YOU LITTLE MONSTER! YOU CREATURE, YOU... YOU THING!
I'LL GET YOU! I SWEAR!
BRUCE, IT'S... IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, SON.

YOU'RE RELEASING HIM? YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS.
HE'S HARDLY PERFECT, DOCTOR BANNER, BUT WHICH OF US IS?
HE'S BEEN WITH US NEARLY FIFTEEN YEARS, AND WE BELIEVE HE'S FINALLY CAPABLE OF FUNCTIONING IN SOCIETY.
HE'S DANGEROUS! A SOCIOPATH... A MURDERER!
SON... I... I WAS SICK. I ADMIT IT. AND I'VE SPENT YEARS COPING WITH THAT.
BUT THROUGH YEARS OF THERAPY... MEDICATION... I'M THE MAN YOUR DEAR MOTHER FELL IN LOVE WITH AGAIN.
TOO BAD SHE'S NOT ALIVE TO SEE IT.
I DON'T BELIEVE YOU, FATHER.
BRUCE, I'VE... I'VE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO, NO ONE ELSE TO TURN TO.
PLEASE... HELP ME.

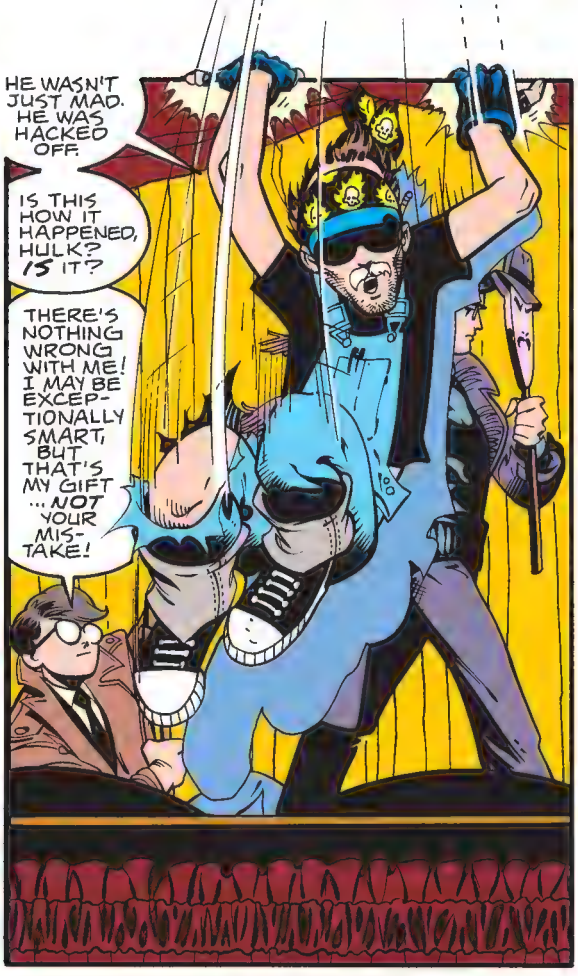
DON'T REMEMBER ANY OF THIS...
HEY, OF COURSE YOU DON'T. THE PART OF YOU THAT WAS BRUCE BANNER SUPPRESSED THE MEMORY.

BUT WITH HIS INFLUENCE GONE, THINGS ARE COMING BACK TO YOU... THINGS LONG BURIED.
Y'KNOW, IN YOUR OWN WAY, YOUR MENTAL ACUITY IS AS SKETCHY AS YOUR OLD MAN'S. YOU'VE BLOCKED OUT YOUR TIME WITH HIM AT THE MENTAL INSTITUTION. ALL YOU REMEMBER...
...IS THIS.

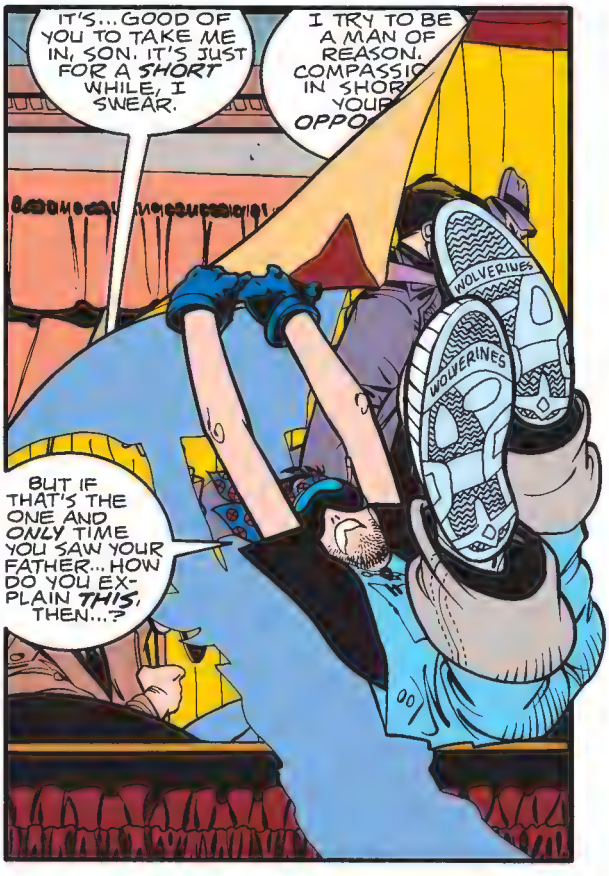

WHAT I'VE DONE... WHAT I'M ABOUT TO DO... WILL BE DONE FOR THE SAKE OF MANKIND!
AND I KNEW YOU WERE A MONSTER, BUT THE WORLD WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME! I KNOW YOU'RE A MUTANT!
R.I.P. REBECCA BANNER
THE "FIRST" TIME YOU SAW YOUR FATHER SINCE HE KILLED YOUR MOM...
...AND THE LAST TIME BEFORE HIS OWN DEATH.
THE DEATH

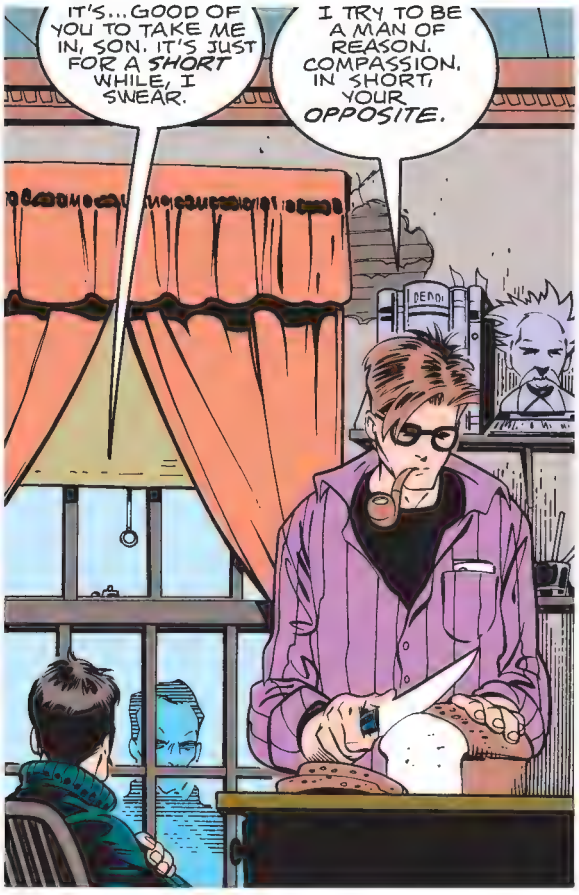

I'VE READ REPORTS OF OTHERS LIKE YOU, BENT ON HUMANITY'S DESTRUCTION! BUT NOW THAT I'VE FOUND YOU AGAIN, I'LL REVEAL YOU TO THE WORLD!
ONCE YOUR WORK IS SCRUTINIZED, THEY'LL KNOW THAT NO HUMAN INTELLECT COULD MAKE THE SCIENTIFIC LEAPS YOU'VE MADE!
THE DEATH

AND ONCE THEY REALIZE THAT YOU'RE *NOT* HUMAN, THEY'LL PREVENT YOU FROM EVER USING YOUR RADIATION-SPAWNED GENIUS TO EDGE HUMANITY ASIDE!
MOTHER WAS RIGHT, FATHER! YOU'RE *MAD!*


HE WASN'T JUST MAD. HE WAS HACKED OFF.
IS THIS HOW IT HAPPENED, HULK? *IS* IT?
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ME! I MAY BE EXCEP-TIONALLY SMART, BUT THAT'S MY GIFT ... *NOT* YOUR MIS-TAKE!

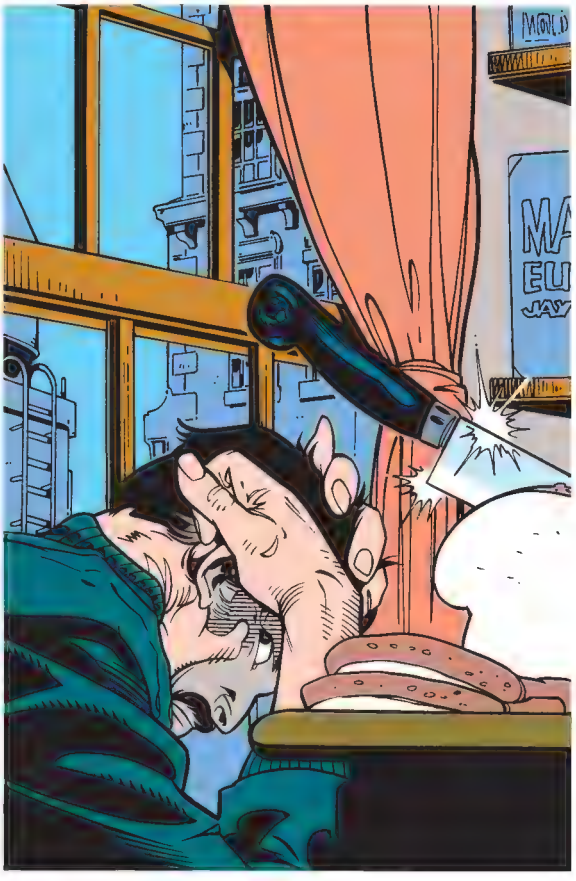
YES. THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED.

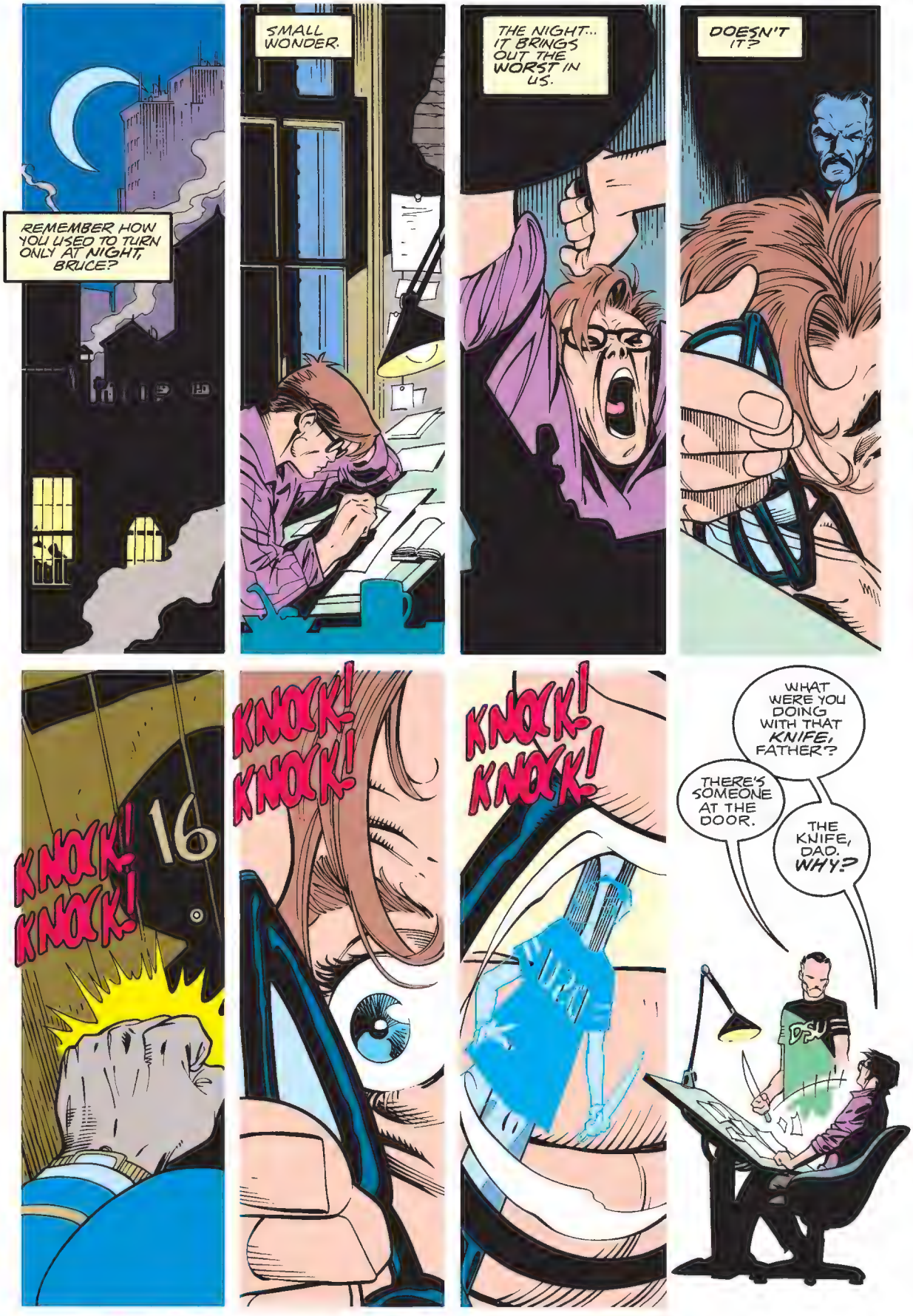

IT'S... GOOD OF YOU TO TAKE ME IN, SON. IT'S JUST FOR A *SHORT* WHILE, I SWEAR.
I TRY TO BE A MAN OF REASON. COMPASSIO IN SHOR YOUR OPPO
WOLVERINES
WOLVERINES
BUT IF THAT'S THE ONE AND *ONLY* TIME YOU SAW YOUR FATHER... HOW DO YOU EX-PLAIN *THIS*, THEN...?


IT'S... GOOD OF YOU TO TAKE ME IN, SON. IT'S JUST FOR A SHORT WHILE, I SWEAR.
I TRY TO BE A MAN OF REASON. COMPASSION. IN SHORT, YOUR OPPOSITE.

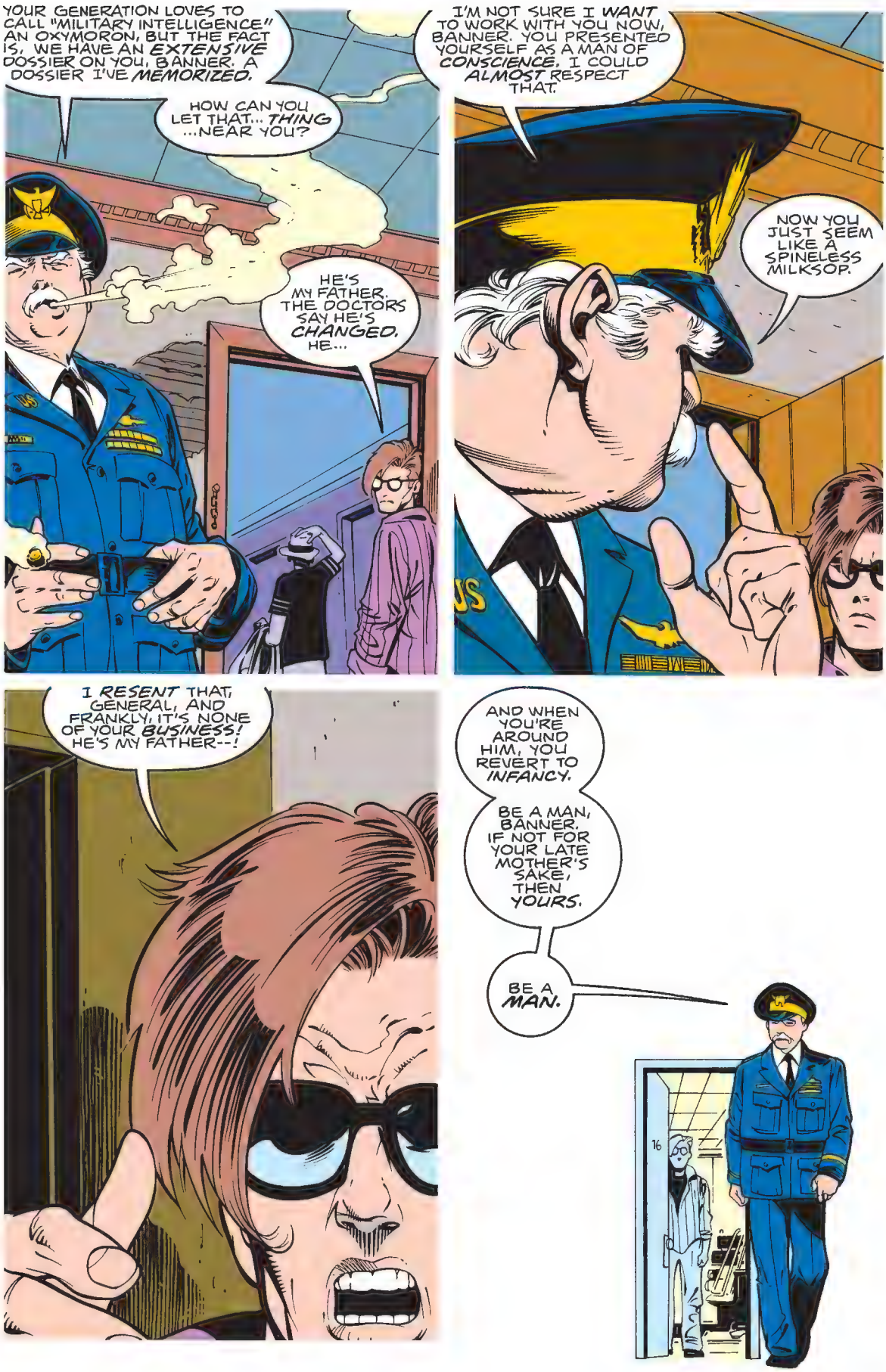
AND I ADMIT TO SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY. HOW DID YOU DO IT, DAD? CONVINCE THEM, I MEAN.
GOOD BEHAVIOR? SAYING WHAT THEY WANTED TO HEAR?
I HAVE CHANGED, BRUCE, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, I...
THE THINGS I... I REMEMBERED IN THERAPY, FROM MY OWN PAST, THAT I BURIED...

TERRIBLE THINGS MY OWN FATHER DID TO ME, THE... THE...
...
I HAD... NO IDEA.




REMEMBER HOW YOU USED TO TURN ONLY AT NIGHT, BRUCE?
SMALL WONDER.
THE NIGHT... IT BRINGS OUT THE WORST IN US.
DOESN'T IT?
KNOCK! KNOCK!
16
KNOCK! KNOCK!
KNOCK! KNOCK!
WHAT WERE YOU DOING WITH THAT KNIFE, FATHER?
THERE'S SOMEONE AT THE DOOR.
THE KNIFE, DAD. WHY?

I HEARD SOMEONE POUNDING AWAY. I WANTED TO PROTECT MYSELF.
DSU
GENERAL ROSS, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
YOU HAVEN'T BEEN IN TOUCH SINCE WE MET LAST WEEK, BANNER. SO I DECIDED TO FOLLOW IT UP.
16
AND YOU ARE --?
BRUCE'S FATHER BRIAN. IT'S AN HONOR, GENERAL. I'M A VETERAN MYSELF.
16
US
YOU'RE A MURDERER, SIR. GET OUT OF MY SIGHT.


YOUR GENERATION LOVES TO CALL "MILITARY INTELLIGENCE" AN OXYMORON, BUT THE FACT IS, WE HAVE AN EXTENSIVE DOSSIER ON YOU, BANNER. A DOSSIER I'VE MEMORIZED.
HOW CAN YOU LET THAT... THING ...NEAR YOU?
HE'S MY FATHER. THE DOCTORS SAY HE'S CHANGED. HE...
I'M NOT SURE I WANT TO WORK WITH YOU NOW, BANNER. YOU PRESENTED YOURSELF AS A MAN OF CONSCIENCE. I COULD ALMOST RESPECT THAT.
NOW YOU JUST SEEM LIKE A SPINELESS MILKSOP.
I RESENT THAT, GENERAL, AND FRANKLY, IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS! HE'S MY FATHER--!
AND WHEN YOU'RE AROUND HIM, YOU REVERT TO INFANCY.
BE A MAN, BANNER. IF NOT FOR YOUR LATE MOTHER'S SAKE, THEN YOURS.
BE A MAN.
16

THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN! NONE OF IT HAPPENED!
SURE IT DID, HULK! TELL ME-- WHY WOULD A MAN WHO "DESPISED" VIOLENCE... CREATE A WEAPON OF VIOLENCE?
YOU SHUT OUT WHAT ALTERED YOUR MINDSET.

YOU'VE BEEN SHOUTING FOR "MORE," MISSING THE BRUCE BANNER PART OF YOU... BUT YOU'VE ALWAYS DISDAINED BANNER.
MAYBE YOU SENSE THAT HE HELPED PROTECT YOU FROM THINGS YOU'D RATHER NOT FACE.

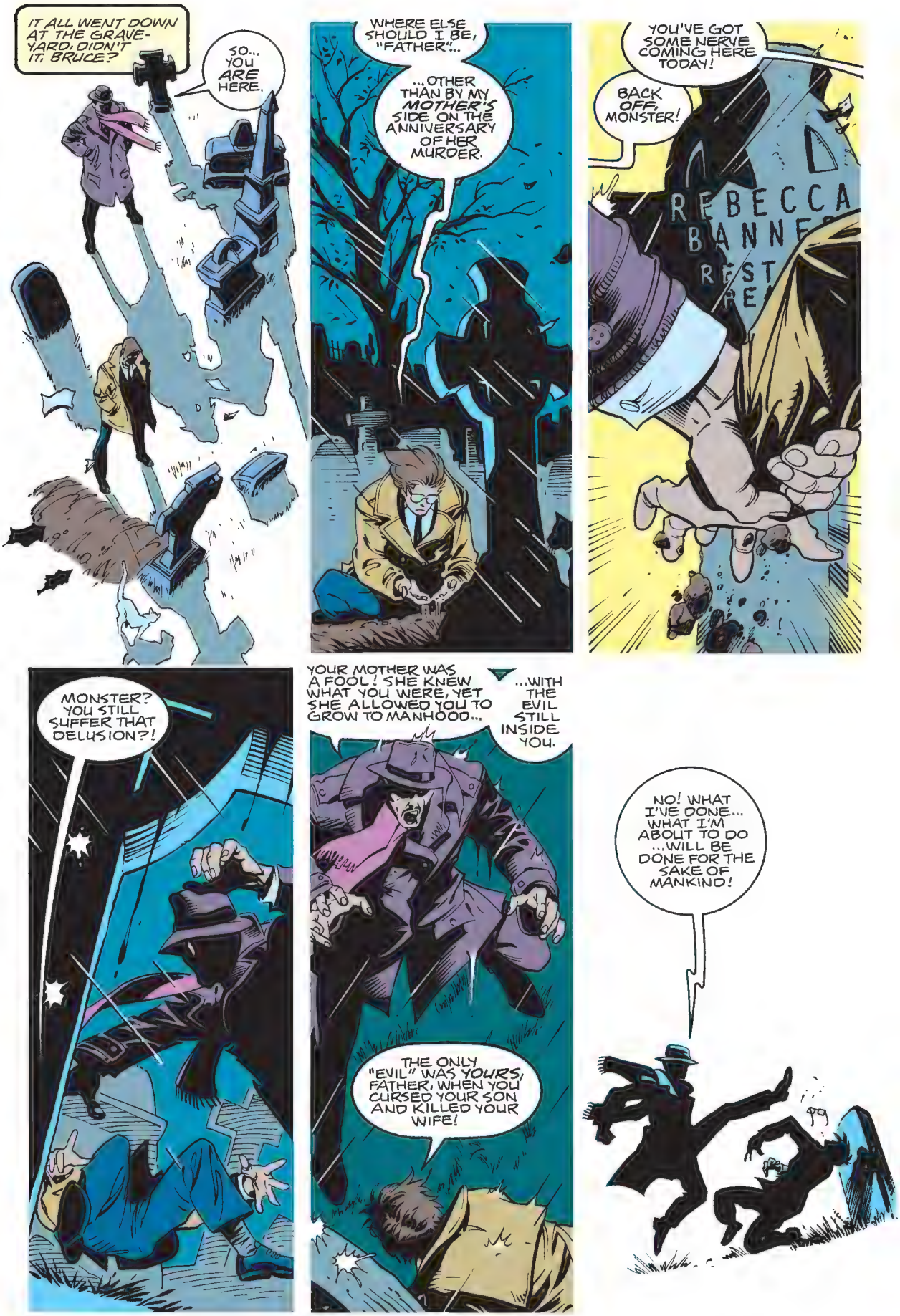
TELL ME, HULK... HOW DID BRIAN BANNER DIE?
THE ANNIVERSARY... OF HER DEATH...

...THERE WERE SOME MUGGERS... OR HE FELL, I THINK...
...HE WALKED AWAY, AND...

NO.
EVERY TIME YOU THINK YOU'VE MADE PEACE WITH BRIAN... HE HAUNTS YOU AGAIN.

DON'T YOU WONDER WHY? IS THERE SOMETHING THAT'S NAGGING AT YOU... SOMETHING YOU--
NO! NO!

NO, FATHER! I WANT TO BE ALONE AWHILE! YOU'VE BEEN ACTING STRANGER AND STRANGER THE PAST FEW DAYS.
PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CHECK YOURSELF BACK INTO THE--
YOU WANT TO STICK ME IN THAT PLACE AGAIN. LOCK ME AWAY FOREVER.
IT WOULD BE VOLUNTARY IF YOU CHECKED YOURSELF IN. YOU COULD LEAVE AS YOU PLEASE.
MY FIRST CONCERN IS YOU. THINGS ARE EATING AWAY AT YOU THAT POISONED YOU. POISONED YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.
YOU'RE HAVING TROUBLE DEALING WITH THEM IN THE HARSH LIGHT OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD, AND MAYBE--
MAYBE YOU'RE WHAT'S BEEN EATING AWAY AT ME! MAYBE THE REASON I GOT BETTER IN THE ASYLUM WAS BECAUSE I WAS AWAY FROM YOU!
DID YOU EVER CONSIDER THAT? MAYBE IT'S NOT IN ME!
MAYBE IT'S IN YOU! AND MAYBE THE FACT THAT I SEE THROUGH YOU SCARES THE SPIT OUT OF YOU!
I DON'T HAVE TO LISTEN TO THIS.
GET BACK HERE!


IT ALL WENT DOWN AT THE GRAVE-YARD, DIDN'T IT, BRUCE?
SO... YOU ARE HERE.
WHERE ELSE SHOULD I BE, "FATHER"...
...OTHER THAN BY MY MOTHER'S SIDE ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MURDER.
YOU'VE GOT SOME NERVE COMING HERE TODAY!
BACK OFF, MONSTER!
REBECCA
BANNE
MONSTER? YOU STILL SUFFER THAT DELUSION?!
YOUR MOTHER WAS A FOOL! SHE KNEW WHAT YOU WERE, YET SHE ALLOWED YOU TO GROW TO MANHOOD...
...WITH THE EVIL STILL INSIDE YOU.
THE ONLY "EVIL" WAS YOURS, FATHER, WHEN YOU CURSED YOUR SON AND KILLED YOUR WIFE!
NO! WHAT I'VE DONE... WHAT I'M ABOUT TO DO ...WILL BE DONE FOR THE SAKE OF MANKIND!

IT ALL BOILED OVER, DIDN'T IT, BRUCE? THE RAGE, THE ANGER.
VIOLENCE HAD NEVER BEEN THE ANSWER, BUT HERE HE WAS COMING AT YOU AGAIN.
REBECCA BANNER
REST IN PEACE
YOUR MIND CRIED OUT FOR PROTECTION. YOUR MOTHER CRIED OUT FOR VENGEANCE.
AND YOU LASHED OUT AT HIM, DRIVEN BY PENT-UP FURY, FRUSTRATION, AND NOT A LITTLE FEAR.
WAM!
YOU DIDN'T STOP SCREAMING FOR A VERY LONG WHILE. AND WHAT WAS ODD WAS...
...YOU KEPT YELLING "NO" WHILE, AT THE SAME TIME...
...YOUR VOICE WAS CHOKED WITH LAUGHTER.

NOOOOO

THEY FOUND HIM THE NEXT DAY, WHEN YOU REPORTED HIM *MISSING*. RAIN WASHED AWAY ALL THE FOOT-PRINTS, AND THE COPS--WHO *NEVER* LIKED HIM-- HAPPILY WROTE IT OFF AS A RANDOM *MUGGING*.
MAYBE THE REASON YOU CARRY YOUR FEAR OF YOUR DAD *WITH* YOU ...IS THAT YOU'RE AFRAID HE'LL *COME* FOR YOU.
*HECK*, YOU EVEN DEVELOPED THE ABILITY TO SEE *GHOSTS*-- LIKE DOC STRANGE'S ASTRAL FORM--JUST SO YOU COULD WATCH *OUT* FOR HIM.

MAYBE YOUR VERY *CREATION* WAS JUST THE BEGINNING OF HIS *PUNISHMENT* FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE. AND MAYBE HE *WILL* COME AFTER YOU SOME DAY ...TO *FINISH* THE JOB.
COME *ALONG*, PEOPLE. I'VE GOT THIS FUNNY FEELING THAT... MORE THAN *EVER*...

"HULK JUST WANTS TO BE LEFT ALONE."

I KNEW THERE WAS A DEATH AND A GRAVEYARD SOMEWHERE IN THERE.
AS FOR WHO DIED... AND WHO WAS BURIED...
...WELL, WE'RE ALL GUILTY OF FORGETTING THE LITTLE DETAILS SOMETIMES.
AREN'T WE, DOCTOR BANNER?
I...I'M DEAD.
THE MONSTER KILLED ME...
AND SENT YOU TO HELL.
AND WHEN YOU TRIED TO FIGHT BACK? GET A LITTLE JUSTICE FROM YOUR LOWLY POSITION?
HE SENT YOU LOWER STILL.
WHO ARE YOU...?

WELL.
I'M NO HIGH-FALUTIN DOCTOR LIKE YOURSELF...
BUT EVEN AS A HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT-- I HAD AMBITION.
I KNEW ONE DAY I'D MAKE A NAME FOR MYSELF...
...EVEN IF I COULDN'T MAKE IT AS SAM STERNS.
TAKE MY HAND, DOCTOR.
OH, WAIT... YOU ALREADY DID.
REMEMBER?
NO...
YOU TOOK MY HAND. AND NOW WE ARE ONE.
THIS IS WHERE YOU LIVE NOW, BRIAN.
NO!
NO!

WELCOME HOME!
WELCOME HOME!
WELCOME HOME!
FATHER?
IS THAT YOU...?
WHO ELSE WOULD IT BE?

# AT GROUND ZERO

35

"THERE IS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF KINDNESS, JUST AS THERE IS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF LIGHT... WE CAST A SHADOW ON SOMETHING WHEREVER WE STAND, AND IT IS NO GOOD MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE TO SAVE THINGS; BECAUSE THE SHADOW ALWAYS FOLLOWS."

– E.M. FORSTER
*A ROOM WITH A VIEW*

IT WAS--LIKE ONE OF THOSE OPTICAL ILLUSIONS. YOU SEE A RABBIT, THEN YOU SEE IT WAS A DUCK THE WHOLE TIME.
ONE MINUTE I REMEMBERED XEMNU, THE MAGIC PLANET SHOW, ALL THAT... AND THE NEXT...

THANK GOD. THAT'S ALL I CAN SAY, YOU KNOW?
THANK GOD FOR THE HULK.

I MEAN, YEAH, I WAS SKEPTICAL ABOUT THAT "END THE WORLD" STUFF. BUT APPARENTLY HE MEANT JUST ENDING, LIKE... UH...
...WELL, ROXXON, I GUESS...

EVEN IF WE FORGET XEMNU'S MASS BRAINWASHING-- THOSE THINGS THEY FOUND IN ROXXON PLAZA? THAT COULD HAVE BEEN THE WHOLE PLANET.
AS YOUR CONGRESSWOMAN, I WILL DO MY UTMOST TO SEE ROXXON HELD TO ACCOUNT--

THE ROXXON CORPORATION DECLARED BANKRUPTCY TODAY FOLLOWING THE CATASTROPHIC COLLAPSE OF ITS SHARE PRICE IN THE WAKE OF THE XEMNU INCIDENT.
CEO DARIO AGGER HAS NOT YET COMMENTED.

ALSO SILENT SO FAR--THE GREEN GOLIATH WHO SAVED US FROM THE FURRY FREAK!
THIS IS MIKE "THE MIC" JACOBS ON FACT CHANNEL RADIO-- SPONSORED BY ALCHEMAX-- ASKING BRUCE BANNER, HERO OF THE HOUR--

"--WHERE *ARE* YOU?"

I AM NOT IN THE REAL WORLD.

I'M IN MY *INNER WORLD.* NOT EVERYONE WITH DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER HAS ONE OF THESE, BUT MANY DO.

ESSENTIALLY, IT'S A MENTAL SPACE MY *SYSTEM OF ALTERS* CAN BE IN WHEN WE AREN'T OUT *FRONT,* CONTROLLING THE *BODY.*

SO THIS *CHAIN* IS ALL IN THE *MIND.*

OOF.

WHY CAN'T I *BREAK* IT?

ADMITTEDLY, *OTHER* "MINDSCAPES" I'VE HEARD OF SOUND MUCH LESS...*CHAOTIC...*

...BUT THIS IS STILL *OUR TERRITORY.*

THE FACT THAT WE CAN ALL *ACCESS* IT AGAIN, EVEN AFTER WHAT XEMNU *DID* TO US...IT'S A *GOOD* SIGN, SURELY?

AND YET, THERE'S *THIS.*

THE DEVIL HULK'S BEEN IMPRISONED IN MY MIND *BEFORE*--BEFORE I LEARNED TO SEE HIM FOR WHAT HE *WAS,* SEE HIS *VALUE*--

--BUT I DIDN'T *AGREE* TO IT THIS TIME.

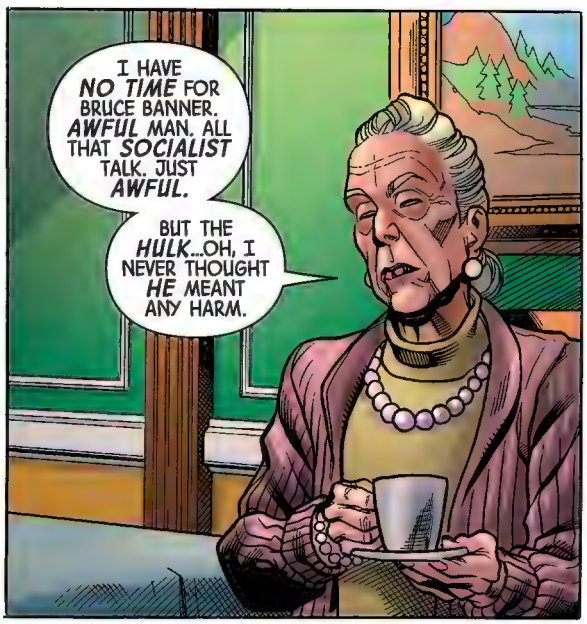
WHO DID? AND WHY DOES THE CHAIN LOOK STRONGER EVERY TIME I SEE IT?
LIKE IT'S BEING REINFORCED...
STUPID BANNER.
JUST "BANNER" IS FINE, BIG GUY.
IF HULK IS "BIG GUY," BANNER HAS TO BE "STUPID BANNER."
HULK IS HULK. HULK KNOWING HULK IS HULK SAVED ALL HULKS--EVEN PUNY BANNER.
PUNY, STUPID BANNER! BANNER WHO THINK HIM NOT HULK LIKE REST!
HULK IS HULK BECAUSE HULK KNOW HULK IS HULK--
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT...
I GET IT. HULK IS HULK IS HULK. YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT.
HAVE YOU TRIED TO BREAK ONE OF THESE CHAINS YET?
HULK TRY. HULK FAIL.
HULK THOUGHT WHITE-THING PUT IT THERE...BUT IT STILL THERE.
DID BANNER PUT IT THERE?

PLEASE. IF I KNEW HOW TO MAKE THINGS HERE, I'D MAKE A-- A BEANBAG OR SOMETHING.
I WOULDN'T BUILD THIS--
BAH!
OF COURSE BANNER BUILD PRISON FOR HULK!
BANNER IS PRISON FOR HULK!
BANNER ALWAYS WANT "CURE FOR HULK"-- WANT TO TAKE HULK'S STRENGTH FROM HULK AND LOCK HULK IN DARKNESS! OR KILL HULK!
AND IF BANNER CAN'T-- BANNER TRY TO KILL BANNER INSTEAD! OR GET PURPLE ARROW MAN TO DO IT!
BANNER WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LET HULK LIVE!
I... NO, I...
I...
...
I'M SORRY, HULK.
YOU'RE RIGHT.

YOU'RE RIGHT. I'VE REJECTED MY DIAGNOSIS SO MANY TIMES. I'VE HAD THIS CONVERSATION SO MANY TIMES--WITH YOU, WITH OTHER HULKS.
AND I ALWAYS SLIDE BACK.
I ALWAYS... I LET MY DEPRESSION TAKE OVER. MY SELF-LOATHING, THE DESIRE TO... TO HAVE THINGS END...
THAT'S WHY I LET THE DEVIL HULK TAKE OVER. I OPENED MYSELF UP TO HIM BECAUSE I THOUGHT... I WAS SO LOW, I THOUGHT...
I THOUGHT THAT WAS THE ONLY THING THAT COULD HELP. LETTING THE DEVIL OUT.
ENDING THINGS.
BUT THAT'S THE FUNNY THING. ONCE HE WAS IN FULL CONTROL...HE ONLY WANTED TO END THE BAD THINGS.
HE WANTED TO SAVE ME.
AND I WANT TO BE SAVED.
I WANT THINGS TO BE DIFFERENT. I...I WANT TO BE BETTER THAN I WAS... TO NOT...NOT THINK OF YOU AS A...
I MEAN IT THIS TIME.
HRR. OKAY, BANNER.
THIS TIME.
THIS TIME WILL BE DIFFERENT.

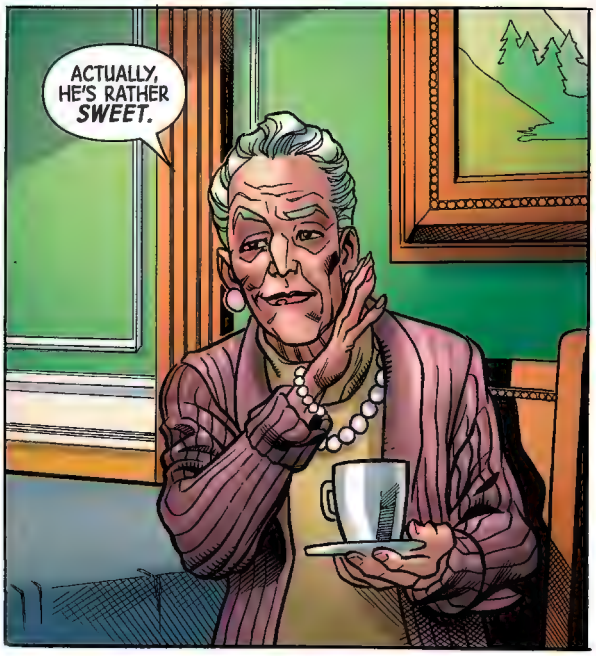
SHADOW BASE SITE G.
OW.
IT'S LIKE THEY'RE WORKING ON A CHAIN GANG IN THERE.
CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE PAIN, JOE?
IS IT LIKE A SWITCHING HEADACHE, OR SOMETHING ELSE?
SAMSON-- I GOT NO CLUE WHAT THIS IS.
I MEAN, XEMNU TRAPPED ME IN BANNER'S HEAD. XEMNU GETS WHACKED, HERE I AM AGAIN. SO FAR, SO SIMPLE.
SO...WHERE'S BIG DADDY DEVIL? WHY'S HE STILL IN STIR, HUH?
ONLY HULK-TYPE HULK WHO GETS A TURN IN FRONT NOW IS SALAD-BRAIN.
WHICH, LEMME TELL YA, JUST FILLS ME WITH CONFIDENCE...
WELL...HE IS THE MOST POPULAR HULK RIGHT NOW. BY QUITE A MARGIN.
HAVE YOU SEEN THE NEWS LATELY?

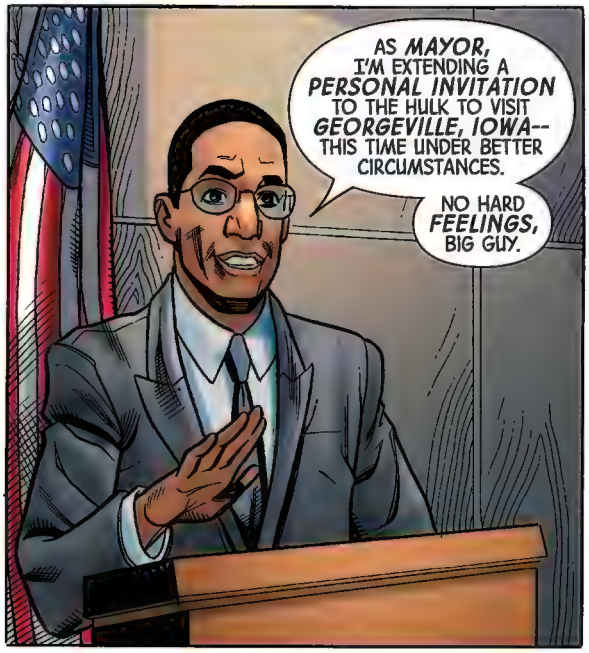
OKAY--THE HULK BROKE STUFF. A LOTTA STUFF. BUT I'M FROM QUEENS, I'VE SEEN IRON MAN DRUNK-FLYING, Y'KNOW?
YOU THINK HE NEVER BROKE STUFF? C'MON.


I HAVE NO TIME FOR BRUCE BANNER. AWFUL MAN. ALL THAT SOCIALIST TALK. JUST AWFUL.
BUT THE HULK...OH, I NEVER THOUGHT HE MEANT ANY HARM.

THE HULK JUST GETS IT, Y'KNOW? HE'S LIKE THIS...KID, BUT ALSO, LIKE...UH...
...HE JUST SEES THE WORLD, LIKE... UH...WITH THIS TOTAL...
HE JUST...HE GETS IT!

WE'VE HAD OUR DIFFERENCES. THE HULK...CAN BE A HANDFUL SOMETIMES.
BUT WHEN I LOOK AT HIM, I STILL SEE A FOUNDING AVENGER.


ACTUALLY, HE'S RATHER SWEET.


AS MAYOR, I'M EXTENDING A PERSONAL INVITATION TO THE HULK TO VISIT GEORGEVILLE, IOWA-- THIS TIME UNDER BETTER CIRCUMSTANCES.
NO HARD FEELINGS, BIG GUY.

YEAH, YEAH. EVERYBODY LOVES THE BIG DUMB APE-- WHAT'S NEW?
BUT NO DEVIL MEANS I GOTTA BE THE SMART ONE RIGHT NOW. AND THERE'S A PIECE I AIN'T SEEING YET...
HEY!
LOOK WHO IT AIN'T!
JOE.
BETTS! LOOKING GREAT! HOW'S TRICKS?
NOT GOOD.
HA! YOU WANNA GRAB A DRINK OR WHAT?
NO.
I'D LIKE TO TALK TO BRUCE, PLEASE.

YEAH. THAT FIGURES.
GIMME A SEC...

OH.
BRUCE, WE NEED TO TALK.

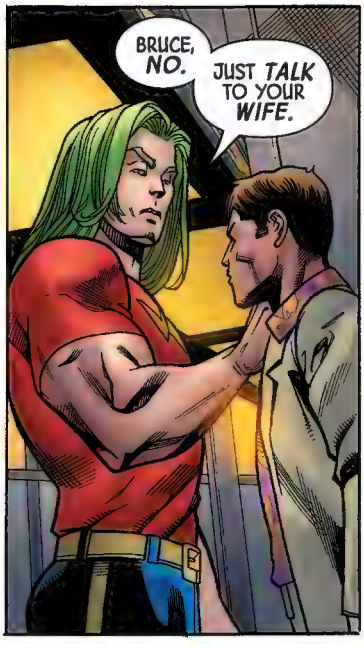
I'M LEAVING SHADOW BASE.
THERE'S NO SPACE DOWN HERE. IT'S LIKE LIVING IN A CAGE.

WHAT? BETTY, THAT'S-- WE HAVEN'T DISCUSSED THIS--
WE'RE DISCUSSING IT NOW.

THEN...LOOK. WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO SAY... CAN YOU AT LEAST SAY IT AS BETTY?
I THINK AS BETTY, YOU'D--YOU'D SEE MORE--

I AM BETTY.
THIS IS ME.

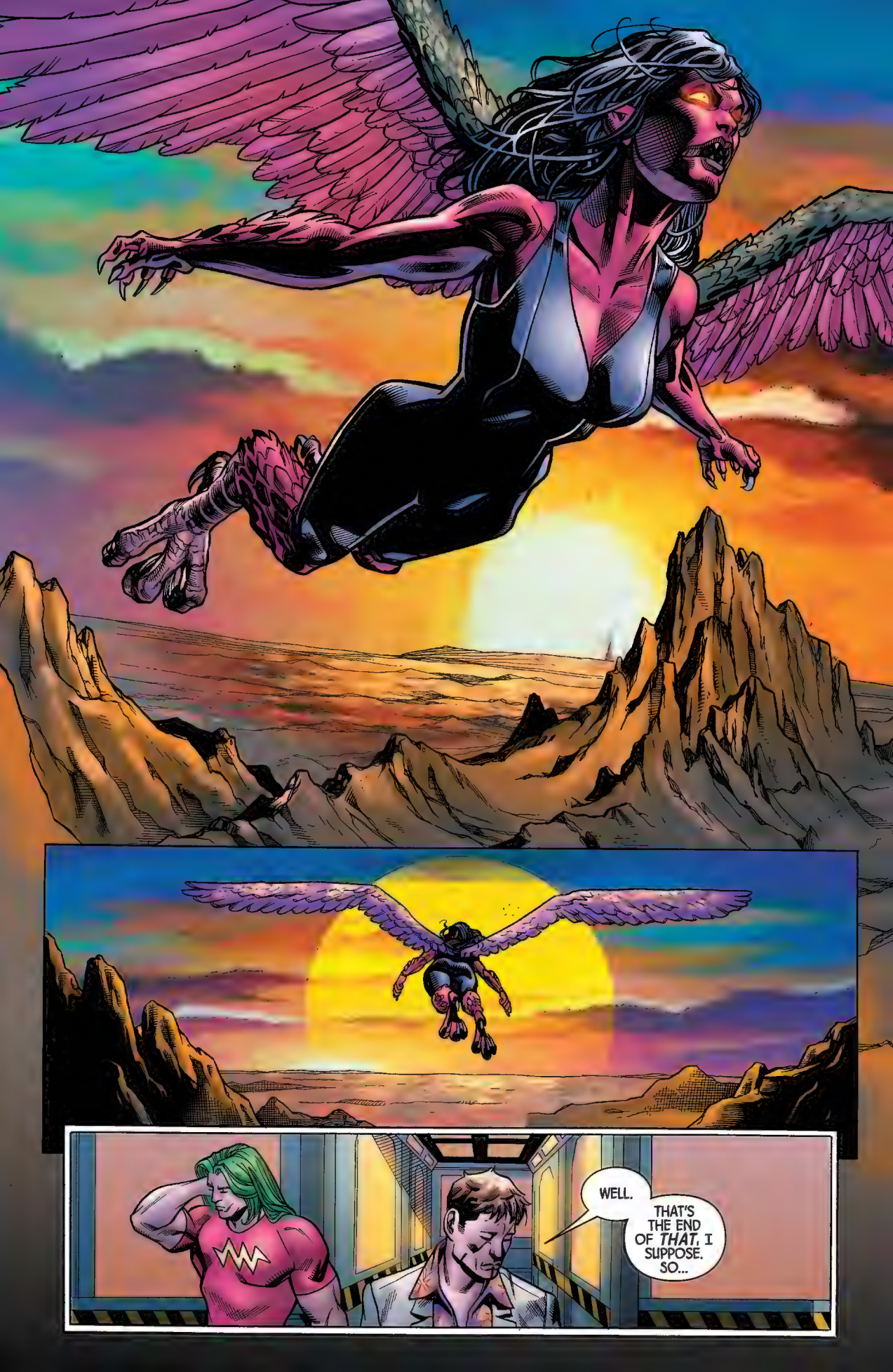
I--I'M SORRY, I HAVE TO--I CAN'T--
LEONARD-- PLEASE-- GET OUT OF THE--


BRUCE, NO.
JUST TALK TO YOUR WIFE.

...YOU THINK I DON'T WANT TO?

I WOULD LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN TO TALK TO BETTY, LEONARD!
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO TALK TO HER FOR WEEKS NOW!
BUT I WANT TO TALK TO BETTY! CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT? I--I DON'T--
I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO THIS--
--THIS CREATURE--
THIS IS ME!
THIS IS ME!
NO.
NO, IT'S NOT.
UNHH--
WHAM

THAT...IS AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR ANGER. YOUR HATE.
THE WORST, MOST EVIL PARTS OF YOU.
IT'S A MONSTER!
I AM SPEAKING TO A MONSTER! A CREATURE OF RAGE!
AND I WANT TO SEE THE WOMAN I LOVE!
...
NO.
NO, YOU DON'T.
I'M LEAVING.
BETTY--
PLEASE, JUST--
I CAN'T LIVE DOWN HERE, BRUCE.
I CAN'T LIVE IN YOUR CAGE.


WELL.
THAT'S THE END OF *THAT*, I SUPPOSE. SO...

"...ONWARDS AND UPWARDS..."

HULK!

OVER *HERE*, HULK!

LOOK *THIS WAY*, PLEASE!

MR. MAYOR, THIS WAY--

HEY, *JADE JAWS*-- CAN I GET ONE?

HE'S *SMILING*-- GET HIM SMILING, THAT'S THE SHOT--

YOU'RE THE *BEST*, BIG MAN!

MR. *MAYOR!* MR. MAYOR, A FEW WORDS--

HULK!

GOD. THIS JUST FEELS *SURREAL.*

A *PUFF PIECE* ON THE *HULK*...

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, JACKIE. I CAN'T BELIEVE MURRAY STILL WANTS THIS GUY ON OUR *FRONT PAGE*, AFTER...Y'KNOW...

I GUESS *TECHNICALLY* WHAT HAPPENED IN *PHOENIX* WASN'T THE HULK'S *FAULT.* TECHNICALLY.

BESIDES, HULK NEWS PAYS THE *BILLS*, AND THE *ARIZONA HERALD* HAS A *LOT* OF BILLS TO PAY RIGHT NOW.

YEAH.

FUNERAL BILLS.

"HOW'S IT LOOKING FROM *YOUR* END, CHARLENE?"

I'VE GOT A LOCK ON HIM. IF WE NEED TO, I CAN TRANSLOCATE HIM BACK INSIDE FIVE MINUTES.
HOW ABOUT YOU, LEN? THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE?
HULK'S BEEN MISERABLE SINCE BETTY LEFT-- BEING COOPED UP HERE HASN'T HELPED. AN OUTING LIKE THIS...PEOPLE SHOWING HIM KINDNESS...IT'LL BE GOOD FOR HIM.
AND RICK'S THERE TO LOOK AFTER HIM...
MR. MAYOR! JOHN PINE, MTN! THE HULK ATTACKED GEORGEVILLE JUST MONTHS AGO-- WHY WELCOME HIM BACK?
I'M GLAD YOU BROUGHT THAT UP, JOHN. BRUCE BANNER WASN'T ATTACKING ANYONE THAT NIGHT--HE WAS HITCHHIKING.
HAD HE BEEN LEFT ALONE, WE'D NEVER HAVE KNOWN HE WAS HERE. HOWEVER, THE AVENGERS INSTEAD CHOSE TO--
YES!
STUPID AVENGERS ALWAYS HATE HULK! ALWAYS HOUND HULK!
AVENGERS SAY THEY ARE FRIENDS! SAY HULK IS FRIEND!
THEY SAY HULK IS AVENGER!
BUT THEN THEY HURT HULK AGAIN!
CRAC-CK

...
RICK'S THERE TO LOOK *AFTER* HIM...
HMM.
*HEY*, HULK. C'MON.
YOU... DIDN'T COME HERE TO *SCARE* US, RIGHT?
NO.
HULK... NOT WANT TO SCARE *FRIENDS.*
MAYBE HULK BUILD *HALF* A HOUSE...?
*HA!* *GOOD* ONE, BIG GUY!
THANK GOD.
SEE? NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
HMM.

OKAY. LET'S GET THE TRANSLOCATOR RIG WARMED UP.
LIKE I SAID, I CAN HAVE HIM BACK IN FIVE MINUTES, BUT SOMETHING TELLS ME WE SHOULD START THAT COUNTDOWN NOW...
I MEAN, I WON'T SAY NO. BUT I THINK WE'RE GOOD.
THE SAVAGE HULK SEEMS... WELL, LESS SAVAGE. MORE IN CONTROL OF HIMSELF THAN HE SOMETIMES HAS BEEN.
I HONESTLY THINK HE'S LEARNING TO KEEP HIS TEMPER IN CHECK.
"BESIDES, RICK'S THERE..."
HULK SHOULD LEAVE...HULK... DID WRONG...
AW, YOU'RE OKAY, BUDDY. WE AIN'T SHORT OF ROOF BEAMS.
LISTEN TO THE MAN, HULK.
YOU'RE FINE.
IT'S ALL GOING TO BE FINE.

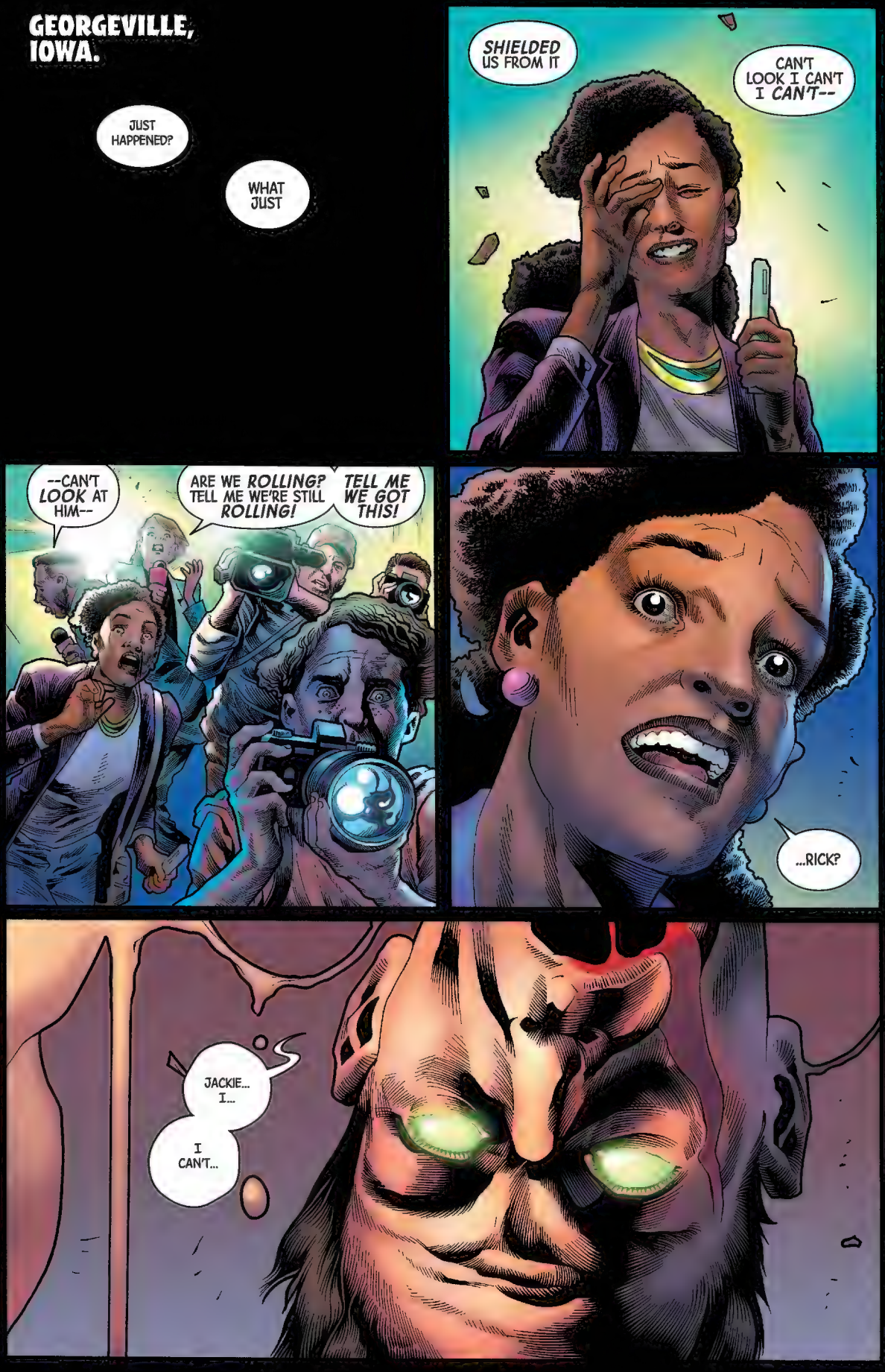
OKAY! WELL, I THINK WE'RE READY FOR THE PHOTO FINISH, FOLKS--GET YOUR CAMERAS READY--
UNNH!
S-SOMETHING... SOMETHING IS...
...WRONG.
HELP HULK.
W-WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM?
JUST TAKE A STEP BACK, MR. MAYOR.
I'M SURE IT'S FINE...
N-NO! SOMETHING... IS IN HULK! BUILDING!
BUILDING INSIDE HULK!
HELP HULK! HELP!
BEFORE--

# A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF LIGHT

36

"Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment."

– Job 19:7


GEORGEVILLE, IOWA.
JUST HAPPENED?
WHAT JUST
SHIELDED US FROM IT
CAN'T LOOK I CAN'T I CAN'T--
--CAN'T LOOK AT HIM--
ARE WE ROLLING? TELL ME WE'RE STILL ROLLING!
TELL ME WE GOT THIS!
...RICK?
JACKIE... I...
I CAN'T...

...I CAN'T FEEL MY HANDS.

H-HULK...
HULK NOT MEAN IT...
SHADOW BASE SITE G.
HULK NOT MEAN IT! HULK SORRY!
HULK SORRY!
MTN
HULK CAUSES GAMMA EXPOSION IN
DEAR GOD.
CHARLENE, YOU HAVE TO GET HIM BACK. GET THEM BOTH BACK HERE--
I--LEN, I CAN'T--
THE BACKGROUND RADIATION-- IT'S TOO HIGH, I CAN'T GET A LOCK--
PEOPLE... PEOPLE WERE NICE TO HULK... AND HULK...
HULK NOT KNOW!
HULK NOT KNOW WHAT HULK DID!

WE--WE NEED TO HELP THEM--
ARE YOU CRAZY? HE'S LOSING IT, JACKIE! WE NEED TO GO!
JACKIE!
JACKIE, COME ON--
HULK--
NO! NO COME CLOSER!
HULK HURT YOU TOO! HULK HURT EVERYONE!
HULK HURT ALWAYS! ALWAYS AND ALWAYS!
HULK ALWAYS HURT HULK'S FRIENDS--
YEAH?
KROOM

GOOD THING THAT AIN'T *US.*

NO. IT REALLY ISN'T.

I'M *SORRY,* HULK...BUT IT'S NOT A *TEAM-UP* THIS TIME.

*GAMMA FLIGHT*--FORM ON ME. *TITANIA*--*CREEL*--GET READY TO *MOVE.*

LET'S MAKE THIS AS PAINLESS AS *POSSIBLE,* EH?

LITTLE MAN?

VWAMM

NO... H-HULK...
HULK NOT WANT THIS...
HULK NOT WANT FIGHT!
STOP-- YOU DON'T HAVE TO--
HE'S GIVING UP--
YEAH, YEAH.
YER BREAKIN' MY HEART.
WHOK
HE'S GIVING UP! STOP IT!
STOP HITTING HIM!
HMM.
POSSIBILITIES.

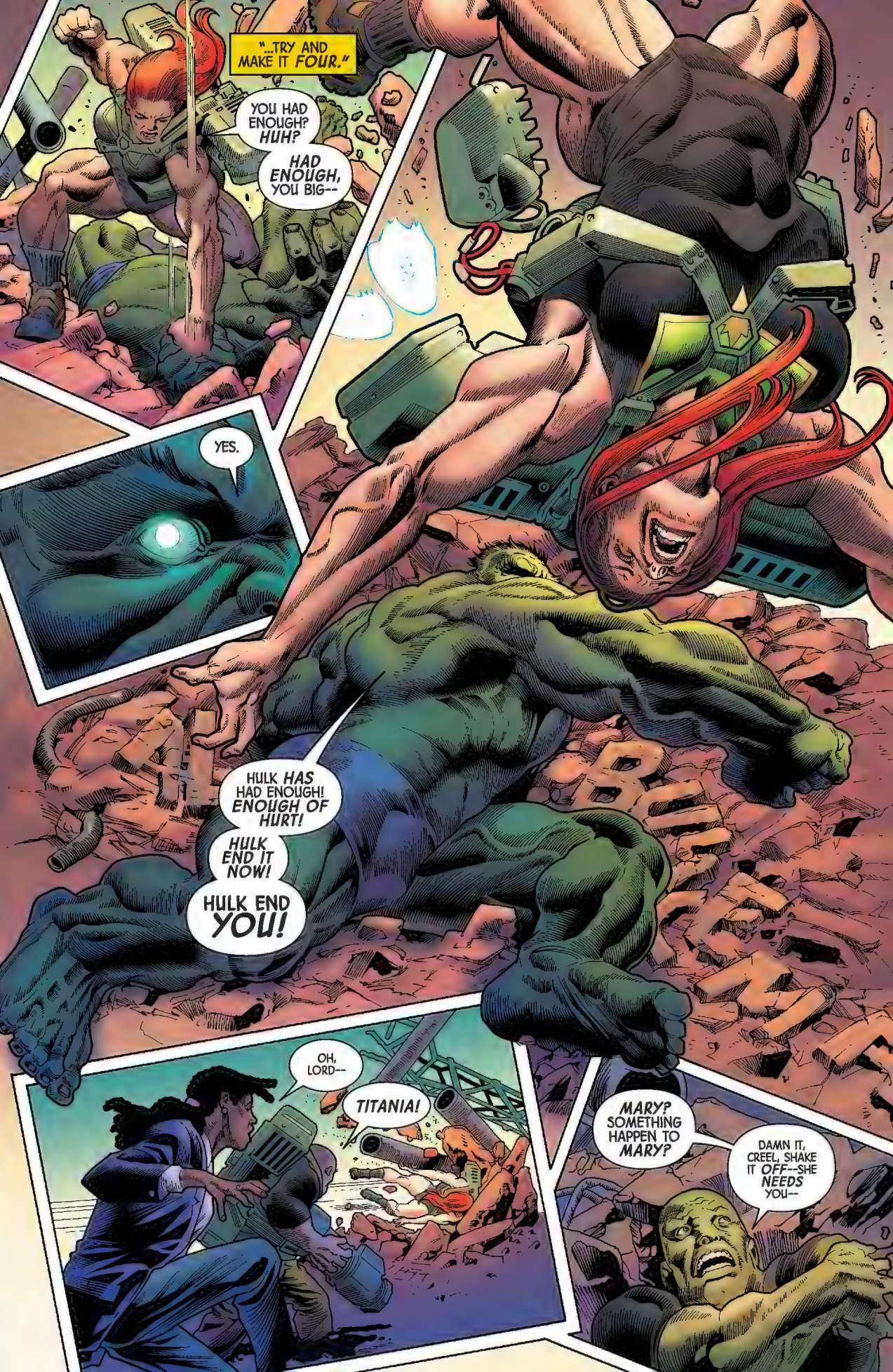
IF HE LEAVES THE SCENE, HE COULD EXPLODE SOMEWHERE ELSE.
I CAN'T TAKE THE CHANCE, EH?
SO YOU ROLL UP AND UNLOAD ON HIM? WHILE HE'S CRYING IN THE STREET?
THAT'S YOUR FIRST RESPONSE?
MS. McGEE-- THIS ISN'T THE TIME.
WE NEED TO TAKE HIM INTO CUSTODY BEFORE HE HURTS ANYONE ELSE--
STOP WRIGGLIN', PAL-- THIS IS FER YER OWN GOOD--
IS THAT THAT REPORTER?
WHAT THE HELL IS SHE STILL DOING HERE?
YOU THINK HE WANTED TO HURT PEOPLE? LOOK AT HIM!
I'VE SEEN HIM LIKE THIS--YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIT HIM TO GET THROUGH TO HIM--
IF YOU JUST TALK TO HIM RIGHT NOW, HE'LL LISTEN.
WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS ESCALATING A BAD--
HEY!
NO PRESS, McGEE! MOVE IT ALONG!
MARY, STOP-- THERE'S NO NEED--
I'VE GOT A RIGHT TO REPORT WHAT'S HAPPENING--

I DON'T CARE! I'M TRYING TO PROTECT YOU HERE!
THEN GET YOUR HAND OUT OF MY FACE--
DEFINITE POSSIBILITIES. BUT LET'S STIR THE POT.
CAN YOU SEE WHAT I SEE, HULK?
I SAID MOVE IT, LADY--
OWW--
MARY-- STOP--
JACKIE?
I SAID STOP RESISTING! I GOT YOUR STRENGTH, PAL!
YOU AIN'T GONNA BREAK THIS--

RRHAARGH!
HURT HULK'S FRIEND! YOU HURT HULK'S FRIEND!
HULK HURT YOU BACK!
ALL OF YOU!
CRUSHER--
HULK, NO--I'M ALL RIGHT--
...
YOU JUST MADE A BIG MISTAKE.

HEY!
EYES ON ME!
YOU WANNA *SEE* ME HURT SOMEONE, HULK?
FOR *REAL?*
RRR...?
'CAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE *THIS.*
CAT

STILL NO LUCK COMPENSATING FOR THE RADIATION. IT'S LIKE IT KEEPS CHANGING *FREQUENCY*...
WHAT WERE YOU SAYING BEFORE ABOUT THE HULK BEING MORE IN *CONTROL*?
I DON'T THINK *ANYONE'S* IN CONTROL HERE.
IT'S AS IF HULK'S ANGER IS...
"...*SPILLING* OUT.
"*INFECTING* EVERYONE."
OUCH.
THAT'LL LEAVE A MARK.
WELL, IF WE SOLVE THIS *RADIATION* ISSUE, WE CAN PULL HIM OUT BEFORE THINGS GET *WORSE*. RICK TOO.
LISTEN, THERE'S A *THUMB DRIVE* WITH MY NAME ON IT IN THE MAIN LAB--IT'S GOT A WHOLE BUNCH OF *TRANSLOCATION DATA* ON IT--
GOT IT. BACK IN FIVE MINUTES.
YEAH...


"...TRY AND MAKE IT FOUR."
YOU HAD ENOUGH? HUH?
HAD ENOUGH, YOU BIG--
YES.
HULK HAS HAD ENOUGH! ENOUGH OF HURT!
HULK END IT NOW!
HULK END YOU!
OH, LORD--
TITANIA!
MARY? SOMETHING HAPPEN TO MARY?
DAMN IT, CREEL, SHAKE IT OFF--SHE NEEDS YOU--

THINK, DUMMY. YER THE *ABSORBING MAN*...NO RULES TO THAT, NO *GUIDELINES*...

WHAT CAN I *BE?* RUBBLE... *DUST* AND *WIND*...

...AND *GAMMA.*

YEAH. YEAH, THAT'S IT.

I CAN BE GAMMA.

OH, *CARL*, WHAT A *WONDERFUL* IDEA.

I COULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT OF A BETTER ONE.

HELLO?
I'M LOOKING FOR A THUMB DRIVE...?
WHICH THUMB DRIVE?
THERE ARE THREE FLOATING AROUND RIGHT NOW--
I THINK IT'S FOUR? WE JUST STARTED A NEW ONE FOR THE FIRST.
THE FIRST...?
DEL FRYE-- THE GUY WE FOUND IN A GRAVE IN COLORADO.
THE FIRST LIVE SUBJECT. WE'VE BEEN TRYING TO CURE HIM.
HE LOOKS THE SAME AS WHEN I CARRIED HIM IN HERE.
CAN ANYTHING BE DONE? I KNOW YOU DID A LOT FOR RICK...
THIS GUY ISN'T RICK. THIS GUY'S REALLY MESSED UP.
ANYWAY. I NEED THE DRIVE WITH CHARLENE'S NAME ON IT.
RIGHT HERE.
GOTTA SAY, DOC--I DON'T LIKE THE NEWS WE'RE GETTING OUT OF IOWA AT--

HRRK.
...
ERWIN?
KUH.
KAHH
KK
HELLO, LEONARD

# THE THING IN THE TUBE

37

"IF THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION WERE CLEANSED EVERYTHING WOULD APPEAR TO MAN AS IT IS, INFINITE."

– WILLIAM BLAKE
*THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL*

DAD...?
YOU'LL FEEL DIZZY FOR A MOMENT. BUT IT PASSES.
YOU'LL--
DAD... I...I CAN SEE...
DEL?
I CAN SEE A DOOR.
A...A GREEN DOOR... AND...
AND THERE'S SOMEONE LOOKING THROUGH IT.
I'LL-- I'LL GET HELP--
HELP ME! SOMEBODY HELP!
DEL, HOLD ON-- HOLD ON--

DAD...?
YOU'LL FEEL DIZZY FOR A MOMENT. BUT IT PASSES.
YOU'LL--
DAD... I...I CAN SEE...
DEL?
I CAN SEE A DOOR.
A...A GREEN DOOR... AND...
AND THERE'S SOMEONE LOOKING THROUGH IT.
HELLO.
I'LL-- I'LL GET HELP--
WHOOPS!
SOMEBODY HELP!
I'M NOT INTERRUPTING, AM I?
HOLD ON--
HOLD ON--
SHOULD I WAIT UNTIL WE LOOP AROUND AGAIN?

AND WE'RE BACK!
QUITE A MEMORY TO BE TRAPPED IN. STILL, BETTER THAN WHAT CAME NEXT, HM?
DYING HORRIBLY, BEING BURIED, COMING BACK TO LIFE IN THE GRAVE...
...DEGRADING INTO A LIVING CORPSE WITH NOBODY HEARING YOUR SCREAMS...
I MEAN, THE WORST THING MY DAD EVER DID TO ME WAS FORGET MY BIRTHDAY.
I'M JUST SAYING.
ANYWAY, UNLIKE SOME, I DON'T THINK YOU'LL PUT UP A FIGHT. WILL YOU?
SO I'M JUST GOING TO TAKE CONTROL, OKAY?
DON'T WORRY--IT WON'T HURT. MORE THAN NORMAL, ANYWAY.
YOU JUST HOLD STILL...
...AND LET ME TAKE THE LEAD.

SHADOW BASE SITE G.
AAHHH...
HELLO LEONARD.
LONG TIME NO SEE...
GABRIELLE-- I'LL KEEP THAT THING BUSY, YOU RUN FOR THE EXIT--
"THAT THING"? THAT'S WHAT YOU CALL AN OLD FRIEND?
LOOK AT YOU-- BACK TO PLAYING THE SCHOLAR, ALWAYS BLATHERING ABOUT YOUR EXISTENTIAL CRISIS OR YOUR LATEST THEORY...
I REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE A MAN OF ACTION, A MAN'S MAN, A HE-MAN!
FRIGHTENINGLY EASY TO MANIPULATE, OF COURSE, BUT THAT WAS THE POINT, REMEMBER, LEONARD?
REMEMBER THE MAN I TURNED YOU INTO?
OH.
OH MY GOD.

THERE
NOW YOU REMEMBER
LEADER.
BETTER YET--LET'S CHAT BACKSTAGE BEHIND THE CURTAIN, AS IT WERE
NARRHH--
YES! YOUR DEAR LEADER!
COME TO MY ARMS, OLD FRIEND!
DEATH IS JUST A DOOR, DOCTOR.
KNOCK AND ENTER.
AAAUGH!

THE BELOW-PLACE.

THERE.

THAT WASN'T SO BAD, NOW WAS IT?

I...I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE.

HAVEN'T I?

YOU *HAVE!* BUT NOT USUALLY FOR LONG.

YOU'VE DEVELOPED A VERY FAST *RESURRECTION*, LEONARD. I'VE BEEN *TIMING* YOU.

THAT'S WHY I DIDN'T GET IN YOUR *HEAD* THIS TIME--YOU MAKE A BETTER *TEST SUBJECT.*

THERE'S SO MUCH TO *LEARN*, LEONARD. EVEN HERE.

SO MUCH TO *KNOW.*

AND BEHOLD! YOUR GREEN DOOR OPENS, READY TO RECEIVE YOU! THE DOOR BACK TO LIFE!
NOW...I COULD REACH THROUGH IT. GET IN YOUR HEAD, AS I SAID... LIKE I HAVE WITH RICK JONES, AND POOR DEL FRYE, AND...
...WELL, WE'LL GET TO THE THIRD ONE. I'LL ENJOY YOUR REACTION TO THAT.
FOR NOW, LET'S TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT.
LIKE THE TURN OF A CARD.
NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE...
STERNS, NO!
WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING, STOP!
THESE--THESE ARE FORCES WE WEREN'T MEANT TO CONTROL--
OH, LEONARD. THAT'S WHY CONTROLLING THEM IS SO MUCH FUN.
TAKE A LOOK.

THE RED DOOR.
RED FOR DANGER. RED FOR STOP--FROM THIS SIDE, AT LEAST.
NO MAGIC RETURN TO LIFE NOW, LEONARD. NOT FOR YOU.
BUT...IT'S NOT ME YOU WANT.
IS IT?
SUCH SEARING PSYCHIATRIC INSIGHT.
LEONARD--NOBODY WANTS YOU. BUT, YES...
...I HAVE MY SIGHTS ON MUCH BIGGER GAME.

"AND I'VE ALREADY PULLED THE TRIGGER..."

GEORGEVILLE, IOWA.

YOU *BLEW UP A TOWN*, HULK! YOU GOTTA BE *STOPPED*-- STOPPED *DEAD!*

AND I'LL USE *YOUR OWN GAMMA* TO DO IT!

YOU SOW THE *WIND*--

--YOU GET THE *HURRICANE!*

RRRHH--
STUPID--
--STUPID
BALD MAN--
--THAT
IS WHAT YOU
DO WITH POWER
OF HULK?
MAKE
PUNY LITTLE
BREEZE?
WATCH,
BALD MAN!
HULK
SHOW
YOU HOW
IT DONE!
HULK SMASH!

JUDD--
I KNOW, I KNOW.
I'M JUST GETTING THE RANGE.
NOT LIKE I'LL GET A SECOND SHOT, EH?
PUCK-- DON'T.
HE CAN BE TALKED DOWN, I HAVE TALKED HIM DOWN--THIS JUST MAKES IT WORSE--
OH, LORD--
WE GET IT, McGEE! HE CRIED! HE'S SORRY! YOU THINK I WAS NEVER SORRY?
NONE OF US GET A FREE PASS--
THAT'S NOT WHAT I--
MAYBE SAVE SOME OF THIS--THIS CONCERN--FOR THE GUY WHO SHIELDED YOU WHEN THE HULK BLEW UP!
THE GUY WHO ACTUALLY SAVED YOUR...
...HUH.
WHAT'S HE SO HAPPY ABOUT...?

JUST LOOK AT THAT GRIN ON YOUR FACE, LEONARD. IT'S INFECTIOUS.

MAYBE WE COULD MAKE THAT TRUE, EH? ALL THIS EQUIPMENT--I COULD WHIP UP SOMETHING HERE, I'M SURE...

NO. LET'S HAVE FAITH IN THE PLAN AS IS.

IT'S LIKE A DOMINO RALLY, LEONARD IF YOU'VE SET IT UP RIGHT...

LEN? THIS IS CHARLENE.

IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, NEVER MIND GRABBING THAT DATA. JUST GET BACK HERE--THE SITUATION'S CHANGED.

GAMMA LEVELS JUST DROPPED TO NEAR ZERO--LIKE SOMETHING ABSORBED IT ALL.

WE CAN GET A LOCK ON EITHER TARGET NOW!

...ALL THE PIECES FALL JUST SO.

NOT THAT YOU CAN PREDICT EVERYTHING.

JONES!

WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?

IT CAN BE HARD, JUGGLING SO MUCH AT ONCE.

LITTLE ERRORS CREEP IN.

I ASKED YOU A QUESTION, PENCIL-NECK--

WHAM

BUT WE ADAPT AS WE GO.

UNNHH!

"NINE TIMES OUT OF TEN, IT DOESN'T MATTER.
TITANIA!
THAT'S IT, HULK--
"THE PIECES FALL IN THEIR SET PATTERN...
I'M DONE TAKING IT EASY ON YA!
AND WHEN I'M DONE, IT'S YER CREEPY FRIEND'S TURN!
"THE ACTORS STICK TO THEIR SCRIPTS...
TH-THEN...
HULK H-HOLD ON... FOR FRIEND...
"TIME RUNS... THE CLOCK WILL STRIKE..."
LEN-- WE'RE OUT OF TIME.
I'VE GOT TO BRING SOMEONE BACK NOW.

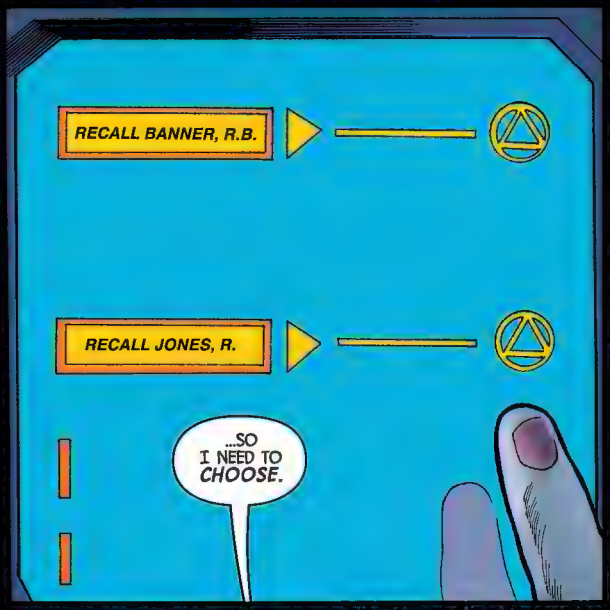
ET CETERA, ET CETERA
I CAN'T WAIT FOR YOU ANY LONGER.

WIRY LITTLE SUCKER--
NEED SOME HELP HERE, EUGENE!
ONE MORE SECOND!

CREEL'S GOT HULK PINNED DOWN--I'VE GOT THE SHOT--

AND OF COURSE THE SYSTEM CAN'T FIX ON BOTH OF THEM AT ONCE...

S-SAVE--
--HULK'S FRIEND--


RECALL BANNER, R.B.
RECALL JONES, R.
...SO I NEED TO CHOOSE.

...
RICK FIRST. HAS TO BE.
THE HULK'S IMMORTAL...
CLK
HE CAN SURVIVE ANOTHER MINUTE.
RECALL IN PROGRESS
JUDD-- JONES IS 'PORTING OUT--
AND RIGHT ON CUE--
-IT ALL FALLS INTO PLACE
SO EASY
EASY AS ONE...
-TWO-
GOT YOU.

# THE KEEPER OF THE DOOR

*IMMORTAL SHE-HULK* VARIANT BY DANIEL WARREN JOHNSON & MIKE SPICER

IMMORTAL SHE-HULK
JOE BENNETT

THEN.
I WAS NEVER AFRAID TO DIE.
AND THEN I DIED.

I REMEMBER A FIRECRACKER SOUND.

A HARD PUNCH TO MY BACK.

A FEELING OF SOMETHING GONE HORRIBLY *WRONG*.

EVERYTHING FLIPPED AND SPUN. REVERSED ITSELF.

A SENSATION LIKE *FALLING*. DOWN AND DOWN, FOREVER AND EVER...

MY COUSIN'S VOICE--BUT *STRANGE*. GUTTURAL.

HANG IN THERE, KID! YER GONNA MAKE IT!

A VOICE OF GRAY STONE.

YA *GOTTA* MAKE IT!

A BURNING SENSATION IN MY ARM.

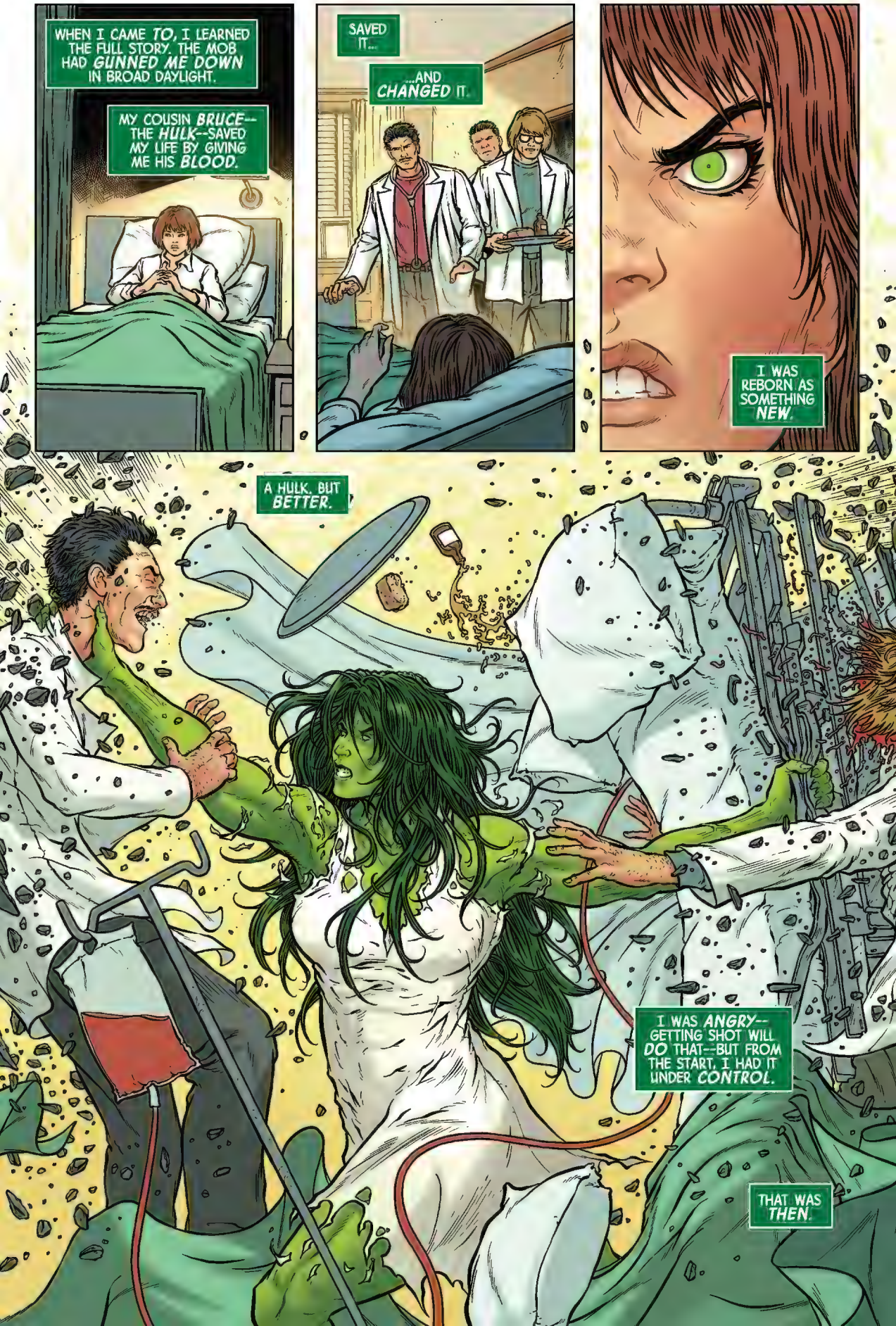
DOWN BELOW.

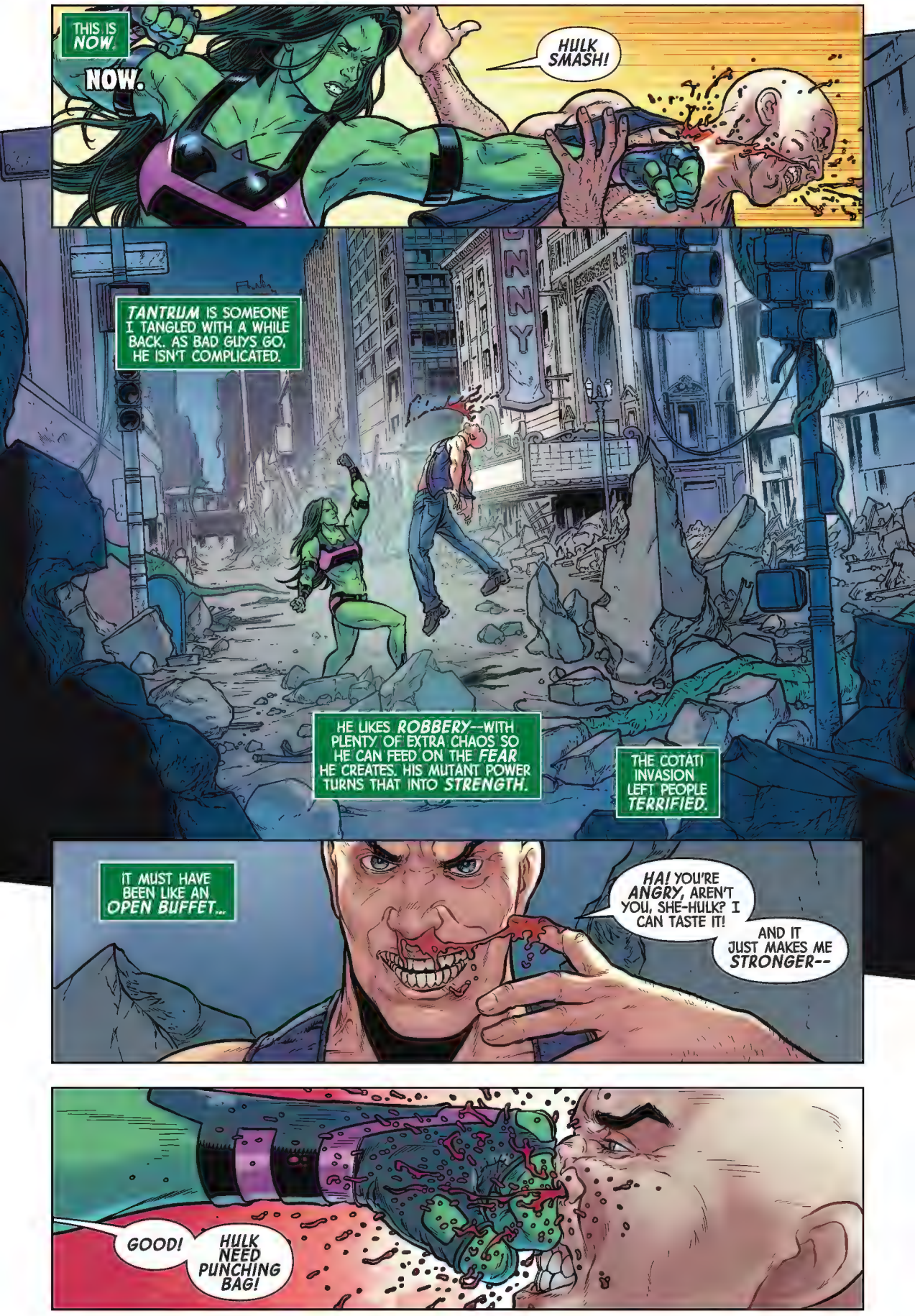
# YOU BEAR MY MARK

BUT I'D BEEN SHOT. I WAS DYING.

IT'S NO SURPRISE IF I REMEMBER SOME STRANGE SENSATIONS.

IT PROBABLY DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING.


WHEN I CAME TO, I LEARNED THE FULL STORY. THE MOB HAD GUNNED ME DOWN IN BROAD DAYLIGHT.
MY COUSIN BRUCE--THE HULK--SAVED MY LIFE BY GIVING ME HIS BLOOD.
SAVED IT...
...AND CHANGED IT.
I WAS REBORN AS SOMETHING NEW.
A HULK. BUT BETTER.
I WAS ANGRY--GETTING SHOT WILL DO THAT--BUT FROM THE START, I HAD IT UNDER CONTROL.
THAT WAS THEN.


THIS IS NOW.
NOW.
HULK SMASH!
TANTRUM IS SOMEONE I TANGLED WITH A WHILE BACK. AS BAD GUYS GO, HE ISN'T COMPLICATED.
HE LIKES ROBBERY--WITH PLENTY OF EXTRA CHAOS SO HE CAN FEED ON THE FEAR HE CREATES. HIS MUTANT POWER TURNS THAT INTO STRENGTH.
THE COTATI INVASION LEFT PEOPLE TERRIFIED.
IT MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE AN OPEN BUFFET...
HA! YOU'RE ANGRY, AREN'T YOU, SHE-HULK? I CAN TASTE IT!
AND IT JUST MAKES ME STRONGER--
GOOD!
HULK NEED PUNCHING BAG!

FINE BY ME. LET'S PUT ON A SHOW, SHE-HUL--
SNIKT
AND THAT'S THAT.
DIDN'T LOOK LIKE THE BRUTE FORCE APPROACH WAS WORKIN'. FIGURED I'D SNEAK UP AND CUT IT SHORT.
HOPE YOU DON'T MIND.
HULK NOT MIND, WOLVERINE... BUT...
YOU...KILL TANTRUM...?
SNAKT
WE GOT... HEALERS ON KRAKOA. SPECIAL ONES.
TRUST ME.
HE'LL LIVE.

HE'S GONNA FACE OUR JUSTICE. PRETTY SURE HE BROKE MUTANT LAW BACK THERE.
BUT TECHNICALLY... HE'S GOT A PLACE ON THE ISLAND LIKE ANYONE ELSE.
ANYONE ELSE WHO'S MUTANT, ANYWAY.
HRH.
NICE FOR SOME.
YEP. YEARS OF BEIN' HATED AND FEARED--HUNTED AND KILLED--
--WE FINALLY GOT SOMEWHERE SAFE. SOMEWHERE THAT'S OURS.
AND AFTER YEARS OF BEIN' A CELEBRITY AVENGER, LOVED AND ADORED... YOU GOT... OH, WAIT, YOU GOT EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS HAD.
KRAKOA EXISTING DON'T AFFECT YOU ONE BIT--EXCEPT FOR IT'S A THING YOU CAN'T HAVE.
NICE FOR SOME.
HULK... WANT TALK, LOGAN.
NEED QUIET, THOUGH... AND...
...AND I THINK I NEED PROPER SENTENCES.
CAN WE GO SOMEWHERE AND GET A BEER?

...WELL, THIS IS QUIET, ALL RIGHT.
TOOK THIS BAR A WHILE TO GET BACK ON ITS FEET AFTER EVERYTHING. THEY JUST FINISHED RESTOCKING--PLACE OPENS IN A COUPLE DAYS.
THE OWNER'S AN OLD FRIEND FROM BACK IN THE DAY--SHE GAVE ME A SET OF KEYS.
I WATCHED YOU PICK THE LOCK WITH A CLAW.
I DIDN'T SAY I HAD 'EM ON ME.
WHAT DID YOU WANNA TALK ABOUT?
'CAUSE IF IT'S A HULKS-GOT-IT-WORSE SPEECH, I HEARD IT A FEW TIMES ALREADY...
WHAT WAS IT LIKE? FOR YOU, I MEAN.
WHAT WAS WHAT LIKE?
COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD.
...
THAT'S A BIG QUESTION, WALTERS.

BIGGER THAN YOU THINK IT IS.
THERE'S... STUFF IT AIN'T A GOOD IDEA FOR ME TO *TALK* ABOUT, OKAY?
WHAT, *FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE* FROM *BEYOND THE VEIL?*
STUFF I DON'T WANNA TELL YOU.
STUFF YOU DON'T WANNA *KNOW.*
FINE. I'M NOT LOOKING FOR THE FORBIDDEN INCANTATION OF WHATEVER. JUST...
THE COTATI *KILLED* ME.
I WAS *DEAD,* LOGAN. *DEAD.*
AND NOW I'M *NOT.*
AND IT'S NOT THE *FIRST TIME* EITHER. IT MIGHT BE THE *THIRD* TIME. THERE MIGHT BE A *FOURTH.*
*YOU'VE* BEEN DEAD. YOU'VE BEEN BURIED IN *ADAMANTIUM,* BLOWN UP BY A *NUKE*...AND YEAH, SURE, *"HEALING FACTOR,"* BUT...
BUT YOU'VE BEEN *THROUGH* THIS.
HOW DO I DEAL WITH IT?

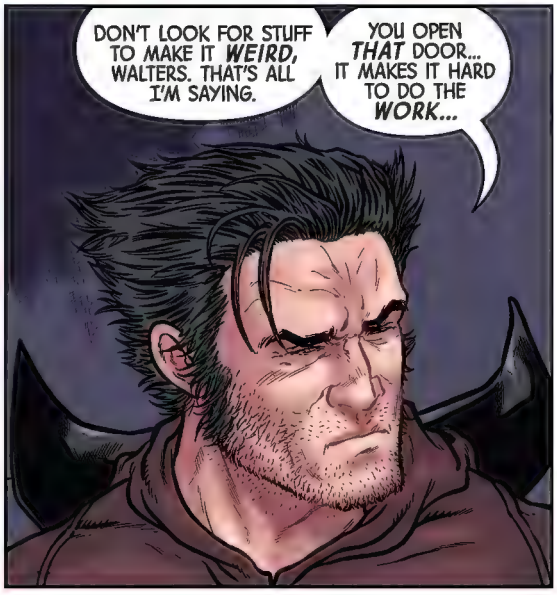
...
ARE YOU STILL THE SAME *YOU?*

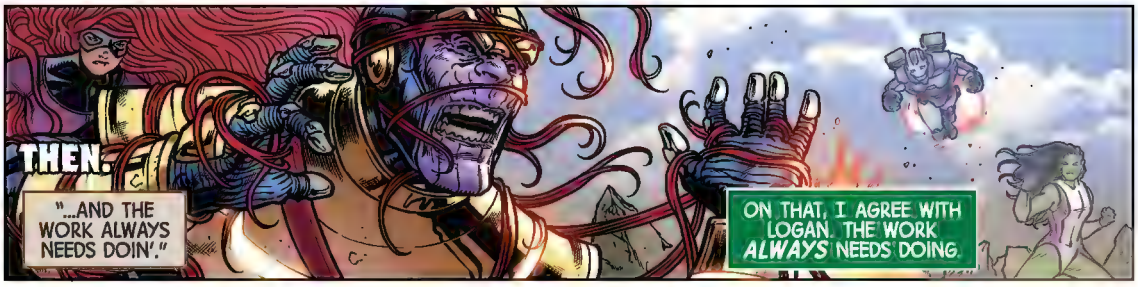
...SURE. I MEAN, IT'S THE SAME *BODY*, I'M THE SAME *PERSON*...
SO STOP LOOKIN' IT IN THE MOUTH.

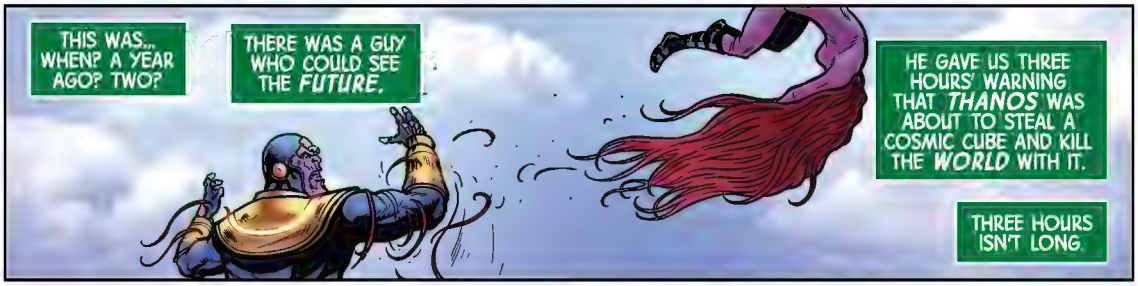
WHAT?
LOOK-- YOU COME BACK FROM STUFF THAT SHOULDA KILLED YOU. THAT *DID* KILL YOU.
AND I WON'T *LIE*--FIRST TIME, SECOND TIME, THAT'LL SHAKE YOU UP.

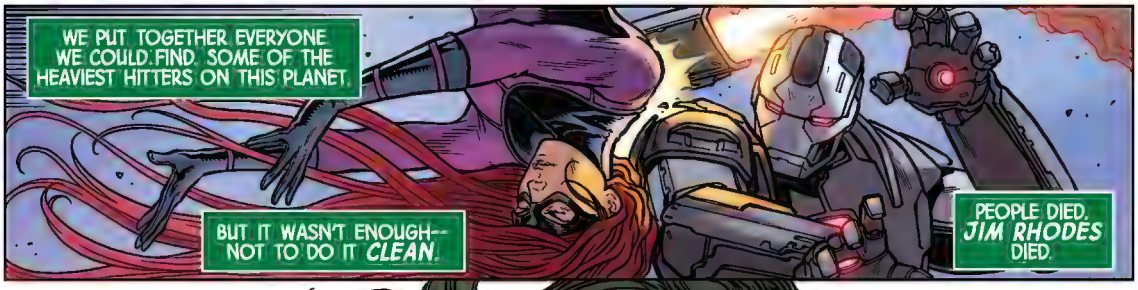
BUT IT'S YOU. YOUR FRIENDS-- THEY *SEE* YOU. THEY *KNOW* YOU. IT'S *YOU.*
SO... YEAH.
"HEALING FACTOR."

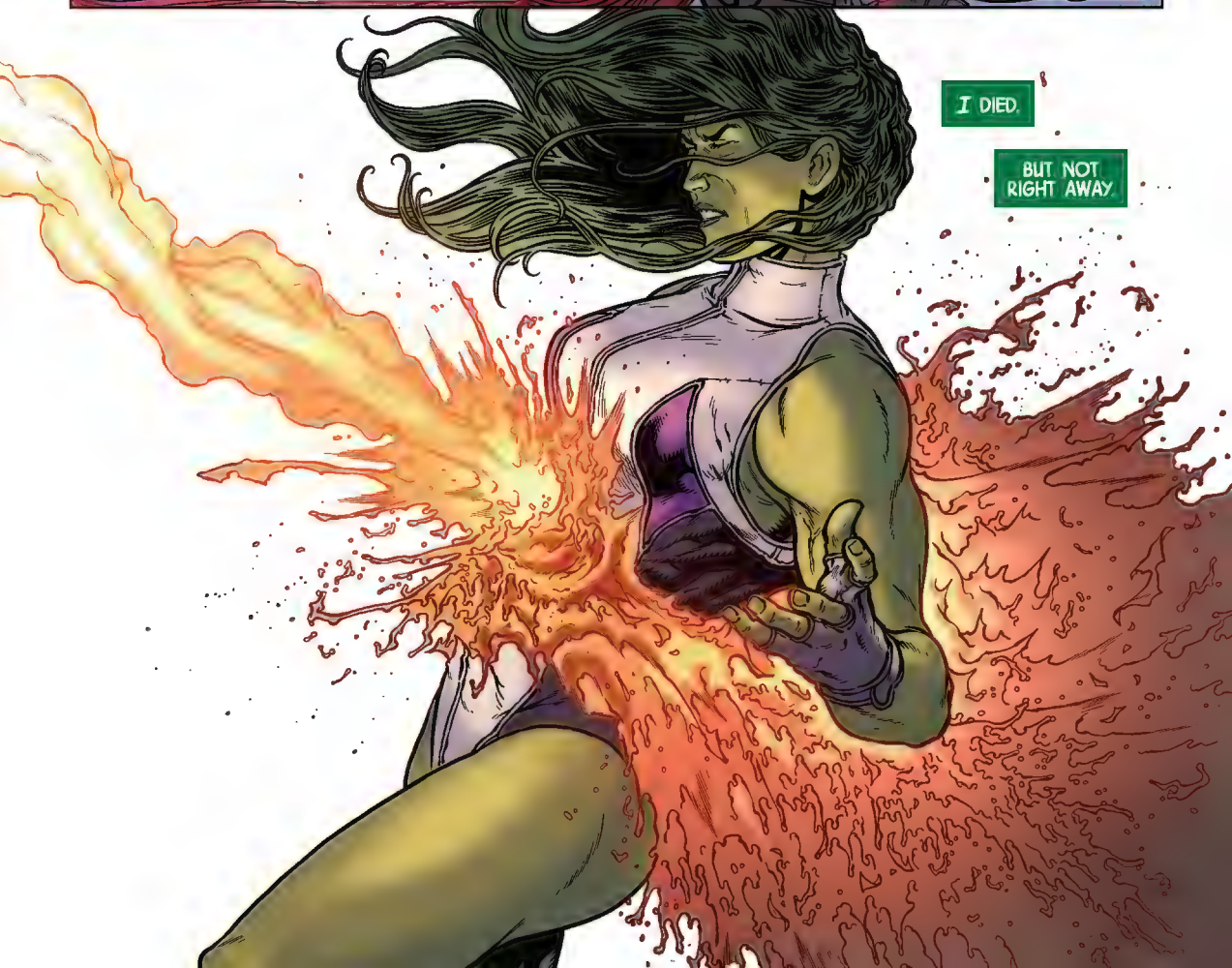
SAME AS YER COUSIN, SAME AS...A *LOT* OF PEOPLE THESE DAYS...
YOU HEAL FROM WORSE STUFF THAN *MOST*, BUT IT'S STILL JUST *HEALING.* ALL IT *NEEDS* TO BE.

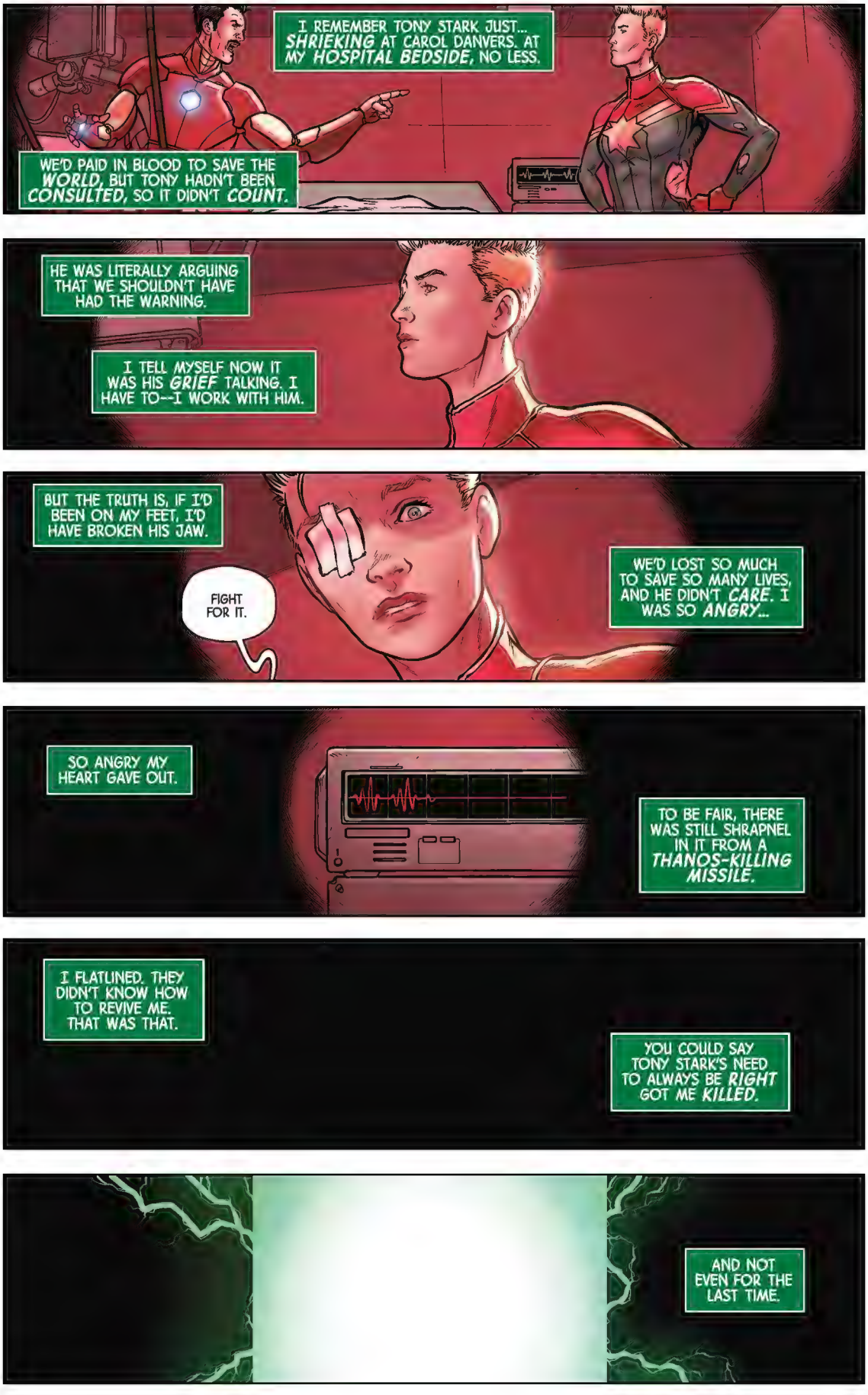

DON'T LOOK FOR STUFF TO MAKE IT *WEIRD*, WALTERS. THAT'S ALL I'M SAYING.
YOU OPEN *THAT* DOOR... IT MAKES IT HARD TO DO THE *WORK*...


THEN.
"...AND THE WORK ALWAYS NEEDS DOIN'."
ON THAT, I AGREE WITH LOGAN. THE WORK *ALWAYS* NEEDS DOING.


THIS WAS... WHEN? A YEAR AGO? TWO?
THERE WAS A GUY WHO COULD SEE THE *FUTURE*.
HE GAVE US THREE HOURS' WARNING THAT *THANOS* WAS ABOUT TO STEAL A COSMIC CUBE AND KILL THE *WORLD* WITH IT.
THREE HOURS ISN'T LONG.


WE PUT TOGETHER EVERYONE WE COULD FIND. SOME OF THE HEAVIEST HITTERS ON THIS PLANET.
BUT IT WASN'T ENOUGH-- NOT TO DO IT *CLEAN*.
PEOPLE DIED. *JIM RHODES* DIED.


I DIED.
BUT NOT RIGHT AWAY.


I REMEMBER TONY STARK JUST... SHRIEKING AT CAROL DANVERS. AT MY HOSPITAL BEDSIDE, NO LESS.
WE'D PAID IN BLOOD TO SAVE THE WORLD, BUT TONY HADN'T BEEN CONSULTED, SO IT DIDN'T COUNT.
HE WAS LITERALLY ARGUING THAT WE SHOULDN'T HAVE HAD THE WARNING.
I TELL MYSELF NOW IT WAS HIS GRIEF TALKING. I HAVE TO--I WORK WITH HIM.
BUT THE TRUTH IS, IF I'D BEEN ON MY FEET, I'D HAVE BROKEN HIS JAW.
FIGHT FOR IT.
WE'D LOST SO MUCH TO SAVE SO MANY LIVES, AND HE DIDN'T CARE. I WAS SO ANGRY...
SO ANGRY MY HEART GAVE OUT.
TO BE FAIR, THERE WAS STILL SHRAPNEL IN IT FROM A THANOS-KILLING MISSILE.
I FLATLINED. THEY DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO REVIVE ME. THAT WAS THAT.
YOU COULD SAY TONY STARK'S NEED TO ALWAYS BE RIGHT GOT ME KILLED.
AND NOT EVEN FOR THE LAST TIME.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED NEXT.
...
GOOD GOD.
JENNIFER? ELLIE'S DAUGHTER? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE...?
DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE ME? YOU AND MY SON WERE SO CLOSE...
IT'S ME, JEN.
IT'S YOUR UNCLE BRIAN.
"THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO TELL YOU, HONEY."

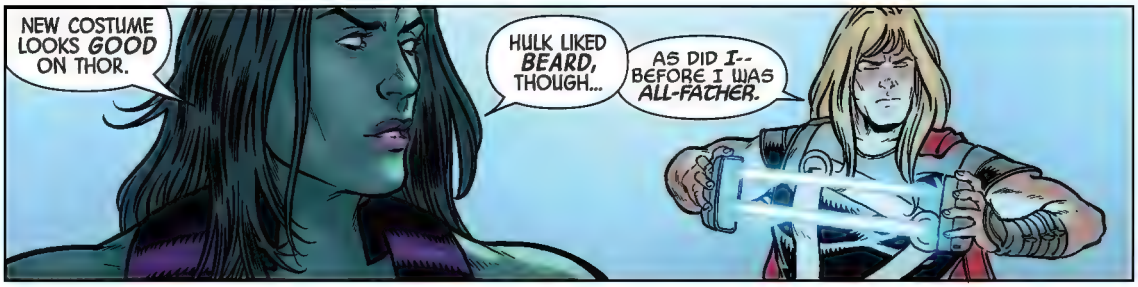
YOUR... YOUR AUNT REBECCA WAS KILLED YESTERDAY.
SHE AND YOUR UNCLE BRIAN...THEY HAD A FIGHT, AND...
...HE SAYS THERE WAS AN ACCIDENT.
SHERIFF
...
IS THAT TRUE?
UNCLE BRIAN.
I'M IN *HELL*, AREN'T I?
I DIED AND WENT TO HELL.

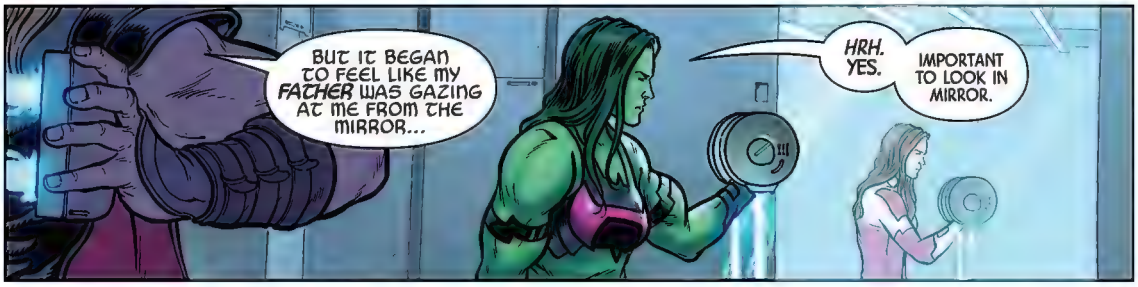
HA! NO, NO. IT'S MUCH WORSE THAN THAT.
I WAS ALREADY IN HELL, YOU SEE.
I DID TRY TO ESCAPE IT, WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY CAME. RETURN TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING.
DEFEAT THE MONSTER, THE SICKNESS LIVING IN MY SON...
...THE DEVIL THAT SMASHED MY HEAD OPEN ON MY WIFE'S OWN GRAVE.
AFTER EVERYTHING I DID FOR THEM.
YOU MURDERED YOUR WIFE AND DESTROYED YOUR SON. YOU MADE YOUR OWN PLACE IN HELL, UNCLE BRIAN.
AND YOUR "ESCAPE" WAS COMING BACK AS A GIANT SCALY MONSTER. I WAS THERE.
REMEMBER?
"REMEMBER HOW HARD MY FAMILY TOOK YOU DOWN?"

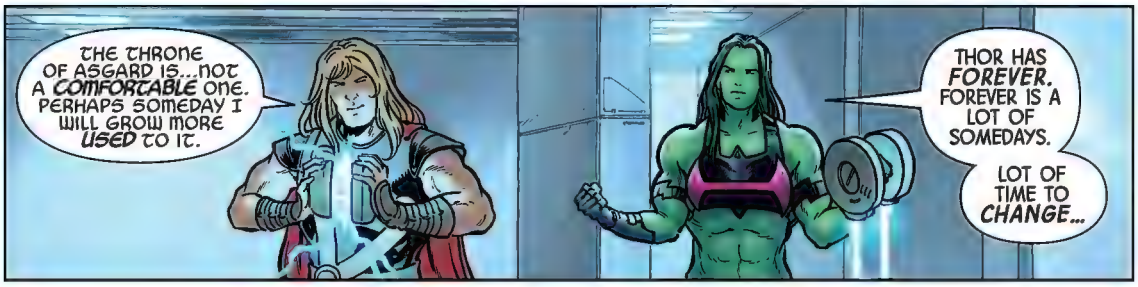
"TOOK ME DOWN." VERY APPROPRIATE CHOICE OF *WORDS*, YOUNG LADY.
YOU DID *INDEED* TAKE ME *ALL THE WAY* DOWN... *PAST* THE COUNTRY OF HELL...
...TO WHAT LIES *BELOW* IT.
HELL ACTUALLY SEEMS *QUAINT* TO ME NOW. IT HAD HIERARCHIES AND STRUCTURES. *RULERS* AND *RULES*.
IT WAS ONLY A *PLACE*, LIKE OTHER PLACES...
...AND THIS IS SOMETHING *ELSE*. SOMETHING *DEEPER*, AT THE *BOTTOM* OF REALITY, UNDERNEATH *EVERYTHING*...
THE *CONCEPT* OF HELL. THE *FOUNDATION*. THE *BEDROCK*.
*THE BELOW-PLACE*.
WE ARE *SPECIAL* TO IT, JENNIFER. TOUCHED BY ITS *ESSENCE*...ITS *CONTAGION*.
*WE BEAR ITS MARK*.
AND NOW WE'RE *STUCK* HERE? *FOREVER?* IS THAT IT?
I GOT THE WRONG KIND OF *RADIATION* AND NOW I'M *TRAPPED FOREVER IN HELL?* HOW DOES *THAT* MAKE SENSE?
*YOU'RE* NOT.

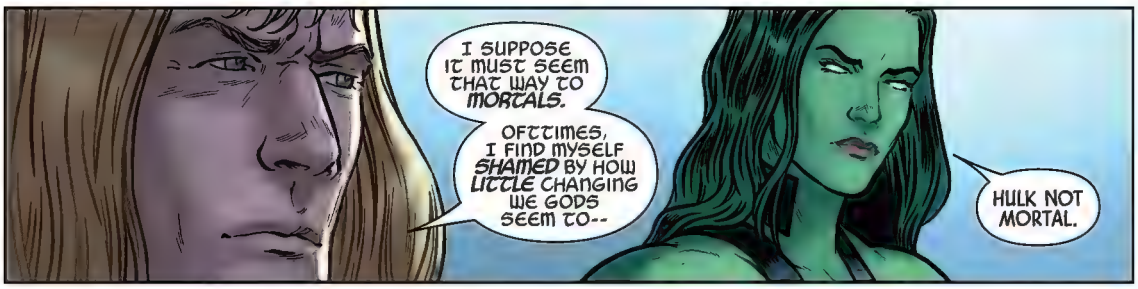
WHAT...?
THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE HERE WITH ME BEFORE. LEONARD SAMSON-- A DEAD PSYCHIATRIST. A QUACK.
HE KEPT... TALKING AT ME... TELLING ME WHAT WAS WRONG WITH ME, AS IF HE COULD KNOW...
BUT THEN HE LEFT. BACK TO LIFE.
THROUGH A GREEN DOOR.
YOU WILL TOO.
THE DOOR DOESN'T OPEN FOR ME--NOT TO LET ME THROUGH. BUT ALL THE SAME...
I'M LEARNING HOW TO LOOK THROUGH IT.
I'M LEARNING SO MUCH...
I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED AFTER I DIED.
BUT THAT WASN'T THE PROBLEM.

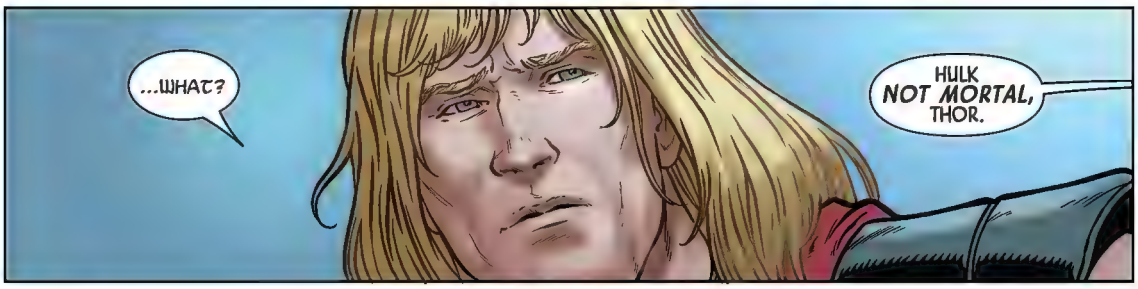
NOW.
IT WAS EVERYTHING I COULD REMEMBER. EVERYTHING I COULDN'T STOP REMEMBERING.
THE TRAUMA MY BODY COULDN'T PROCESS. THE FLASHBACKS, THE RANDOM SURGES OF FIGHT OR FLIGHT.
AND I WAS A HULK. SO I HAD TO STAY IN CONTROL. ALWAYS.
I WAS A HULK.
CAUTION REPULSOR AND TRACTOR TECH IN OPERATION
SO. EVERYONE COULD SEE.
I FELT BROKEN. TAINTED.
SOMETIMES I STILL DO.
I KEEP IT TO MYSELF.
THOR?
WANT... TRAIN WITH HULK?
...
AYE, WHY NOT?

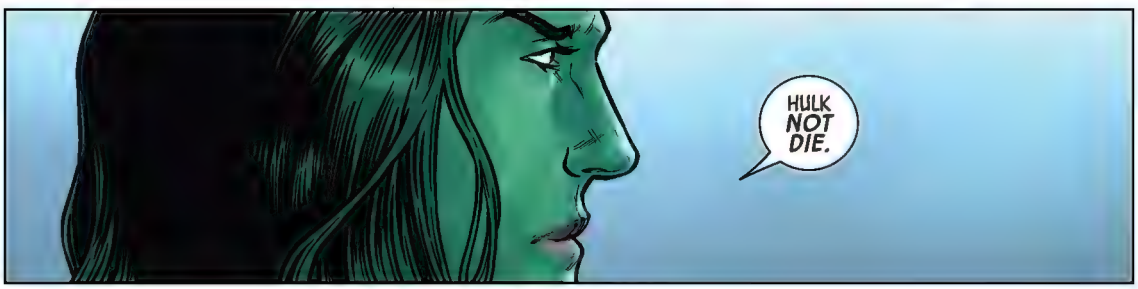

NEW COSTUME LOOKS GOOD ON THOR.
HULK LIKED BEARD, THOUGH...
AS DID I-- BEFORE I WAS ALL-FATHER.


BUT IT BEGAN TO FEEL LIKE MY FATHER WAS GAZING AT ME FROM THE MIRROR...
HRH. YES.
IMPORTANT TO LOOK IN MIRROR.


THE THRONE OF ASGARD IS...NOT A COMFORTABLE ONE. PERHAPS SOMEDAY I WILL GROW MORE USED TO IT.
THOR HAS FOREVER. FOREVER IS A LOT OF SOMEDAYS.
LOT OF TIME TO CHANGE...


I SUPPOSE IT MUST SEEM THAT WAY TO MORTALS.
OFTTIMES, I FIND MYSELF SHAMED BY HOW LITTLE CHANGING WE GODS SEEM TO--
HULK NOT MORTAL.


...WHAT?
HULK NOT MORTAL, THOR.


HULK NOT DIE.

OR...HULK DIES, BUT HULK COMES BACK. HULK IS A HULK. AN IMMORTAL HULK.
HULK HAS FOREVER, LIKE THOR...BUT ONLY STARTING.
WHAT FOREVER LIKE FROM OTHER END?
...
A VAST QUESTION.
WOULD YOU RATHER TALK ABOUT IT AS JENNIFER?
TRIED. FELT... TOO HEAVY FOR JEN.
NEEDS HULK TO BEAR IT.
WELL...I AM SORRY, HULK.
BUT IT WILL GROW HEAVIER.
AS YOU SAY--YOU ARE AT THE START, AND SO YOU CANNOT SEE THE FINISH.
BUT WHETHER MY FINISH IS MILLENNIA HENCE OR...SOONER THAN I WOULD LIKE...IT IS STILL WRITTEN.
"I REMEMBER GALACTUS.
"HE WAS IMMORTAL BY ANY MEASURE. HE SURVIVED THE DEATH OF A MULTIVERSE, THE BIRTH OF ANOTHER, AND LIVED MILLENNIA BEYOND THAT.
"AND STILL, I LOOKED HIM IN THE EYE...

"...AND I BROUGHT THAT TO AN END."
THOR...KILLED GALACTUS...?
IT FELT LIKE JUSTICE, AT THE TIME.*
IN ANY CASE, THE DEED IS DONE.
*SEE THOR (2020) #6. -WIL
HE WAS IMMORTAL, AND NOW HE IS DEAD.
AS WILL I BE. AS WILL YOU.
THAT IS ALL THE ADVICE I HAVE, HULK.
TO REMEMBER...
...THAT THERE ARE NONE WHO HAVE FOREVER.
OH, I REMEMBER.

THEN.
I REMEMBER THE THIRD TIME I DIED.
I WAS ON THE MOON, MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE COTATI.
THE SAME COTATI WHO INVADED EARTH, WHO WANTED TO WIPE OUT THE GALAXY...BUT TONY THOUGHT THEY WERE THE GOOD GUYS. AND TONY ALWAYS HAS TO BE RIGHT.
NOT THAT I KNEW BETTER. I'D LIKE TO SAY I SUSPECTED--BUT THAT WOULD BE A LIE.
I'M NOT STUPID WHEN I'M HULK.
WORDS ARE HARDER FOR ME--FRAGILE SHELLS FOR MY BLAZING GREEN THOUGHTS.
HULK?
HRH?
THAT DOESN'T MAKE ME STUPID.
FOLLOW ME. YOU'LL NEED A WEAPON AGAINST THE ENEMY.
HULK NOT NEED PUNY SWORD--
BUT I WAS STUPID THEN.
TRUST ME.
YOU'LL NEED THIS.

THEY SPLIT ME OFF FROM THE OTHERS. TRUSTING AS A LAMB.
I HAD A SECOND TO FEEL THE TENDRILS TAKE MY LEGS OUT FROM UNDER ME—
THEN THEY WERE TEARING INTO MY BRAIN.
YOU'RE SURE THEY'RE STRONG ENOUGH? SHE'S A HULK...
THESE TENDRILS ARE CENTAURIAN IRONWOOD, SWORDSMAN.
STRONGER THAN A BATTLESHIP'S HULL...
...AND BLESSED BY OUR MESSIAH.
YOU MUST HAVE MORE FAITH...
YES...YES, FAITH...
FAITH.
THEY MURDERED ME JUST TO HIDE IN MY CORPSE. WORE IT LIKE A SUIT OF CLOTHES TO INFILTRATE THE AVENGERS.
SO I'M TOLD, ANYWAY.

I WASN'T THERE.
GOOD LORD. IS THAT JENNIFER WALTERS?
IT'S BEEN A DOG'S AGE.

HOLY CRAP.
SAM STERNS? THE LEADER? IS THAT YOU?
WHAT IS THIS-- SOME POCKET DIMENSION YOU MADE? ARE YOU IN LEAGUE WITH THE COTATI?
IT FEELS FAMILIAR... BUT...
YOU REMEMBER PREVIOUS VISITS? TELL ME MORE.
THIS IS INVALUABLE DATA...
I DO REMEMBER... THERE'S A DOOR OUT, ISN'T THERE?
A GREEN DOOR.
I'M GOING TO COME BACK TO LIFE. LIKE BRUCE, LIKE LEONARD...LIKE YOU.
YES! WONDERFUL!
THAT'S WHAT LED ME TO THE GREEN DOOR, TO THE ONE BELOW ALL... TO MY NEW PLANS.
PLANS SO VAST, SO AMBITIOUS... THEY SPAN TO THE END OF TIME.
WHICH, AS A GAMMA MUTATE, I WILL SEE...
YOU'RE FORGETTING SOMETHING, STERNS. YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY GAMMA MUTATE OUT THERE. AND THE REST OF US DON'T LIKE YOU VERY MUCH.
I GUESS WE'LL BE USING THAT BIG HEAD AS A FOOTBALL UNTIL THE END OF TIME...
OH, JEN. JEN, JEN, JEN...
YOU GUESS WRONG.

NOW.
AND THEN I CAME BACK.
AAAHHH!
THERE WASN'T TIME TO QUESTION IT. NOT THEN.
SO I BURNED THE COTATI OUT OF MY SYSTEM. I JOINED THE FINAL BATTLE.
I KICKED BUTT, I TOOK NAMES. I DID WHAT AVENGERS DO.
UHHN... NO...NO, NO, NO...
AND WHEN I FINALLY DID START QUESTIONING...
NNRRAAARGH!
WOLVERINE TOLD ME IT DIDN'T CHANGE ANYTHING. THOR TOLD ME IMMORTALITY DIDN'T EXIST.
IGNORE IT. DENY IT. FORGET IT.
AND THE WORST PART IS... MAYBE THEY'RE RIGHT. MAYBE I SHOULD DO THAT...BECAUSE SOMETHING HAPPENED LAST TIME.
I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT, BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED.

AND IT SCARED ME.
YOU WON'T BE USING MY HEAD AS A FOOTBALL, JEN.
FOR ONE THING, YOU WON'T EVEN REMEMBER THIS CONVERSATION.
AND FOR ANOTHER...YOU DON'T HAVE UNTIL THE END OF TIME.
YOU'RE NOT IMMORTAL. NEITHER IS BRUCE.
YOU JUST HAVE A KEY OTHERS DON'T. THE KEY TO A GREEN DOOR-- THE DOOR BACK FROM DEATH.
BUT THE TROUBLE WITH KEYS...
...IS THAT SOMETIMES, PEOPLE CHANGE THE LOCKS.
SEE? I DECIDE IF THE GREEN DOOR'S OPEN NOW.
I DECIDE IF IT'S CLOSED.
NOW... YOU'VE CAUGHT ME IN A GOOD MOOD. AND IF YOU STAYED HERE, YOU'D BE A COMPLICATION I DON'T NEED.
SO BACK YOU GO.
BUT IF YOU REMEMBER NOTHING ELSE... REMEMBER THIS.
DON'T DIE AGAIN, JEN.
DON'T EVER DIE AGAIN.
I WAS NEVER AFRAID TO DIE.

# THE THREE DEATHS OF JENNIFER WALTERS

38

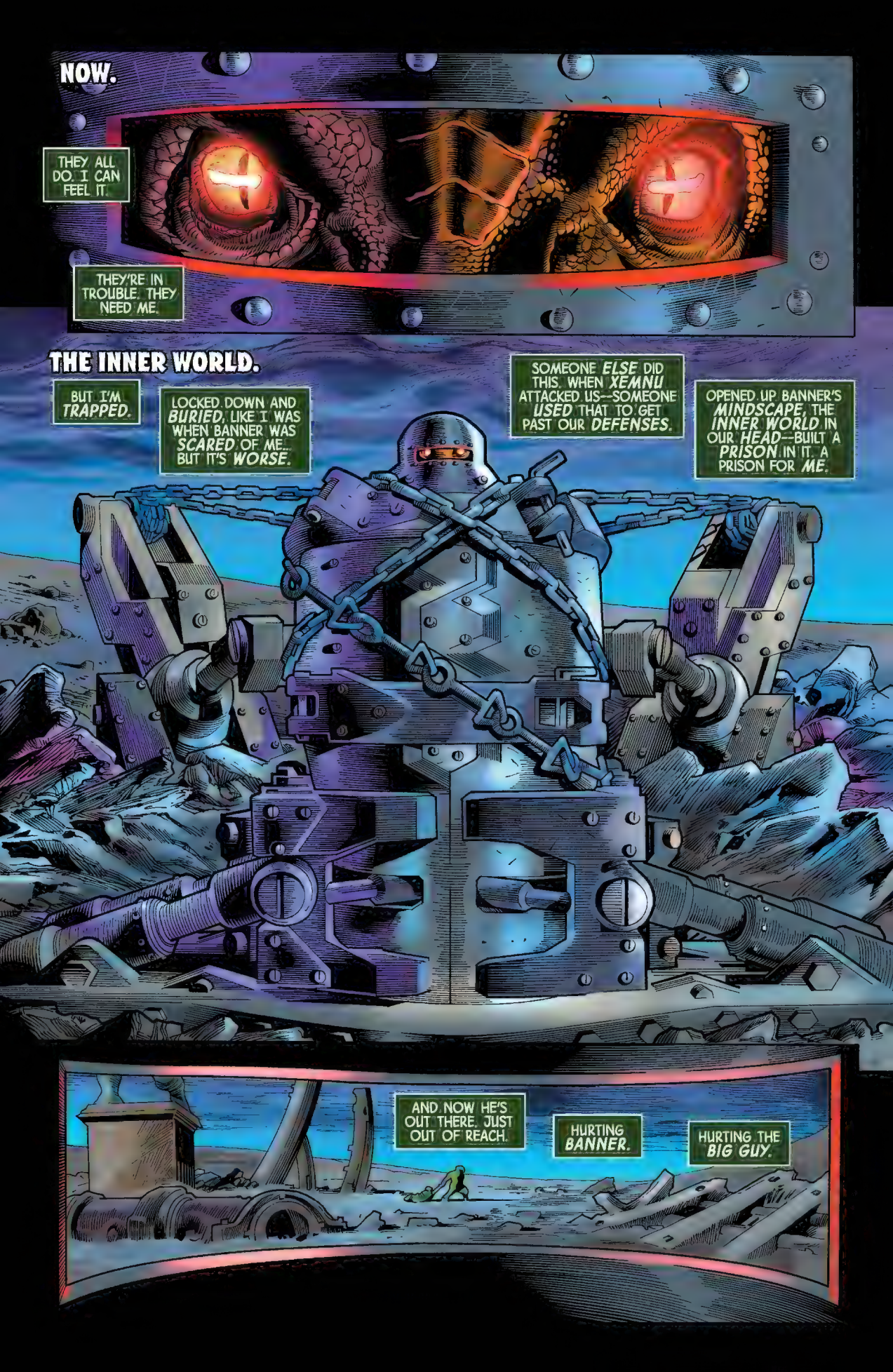
"WHAT THOUGH THE FIELD BE LOST?
ALL IS NOT LOST; THE UNCONQUERABLE WILL,
AND STUDY OF REVENGE, IMMORTAL HATE,
AND COURAGE NEVER TO SUBMIT OR YIELD:
AND WHAT IS ELSE NOT TO BE OVERCOME?"

– JOHN MILTON
*PARADISE LOST*

YEARS AGO.
PARADISE LOST
Shall that be shut to Man, which to the Beast
Is open? or will God incense his ire
For such a petty Trespass, and not praise
Rather your dauntless vertue, whom the pain
Of Death denounc't, whatever thing Death be,
Deterrd not from atchieving what might leade
To happier life, knowledge of Good and Evil,
Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known, since easier shunnd?
God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;
Not just, not God, not feard then, nor obeyd
Your feare it self of Death removes the feare
Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,
Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,
His worshippers; he knows that in the day
Ye Eate thereof, your Eyes that seem so cleere,
Yet are but dim, shall perfetly be then
Op'nd and cleerd, and ye shall be as Gods,
Knowing both Good and Evil as they know
That ye should be as Gods, since I as Man,
Internal Man, is but proportion meet,
I of brute human, yee of human Gods
So ye shall die perhaps, by putting off
Human, to put on Gods, death to be wisht,
Though threat'nd, which no worse then this
can bring
And what are Gods that Man may not become
As they, participating God-like food?
The Gods are first, and that advantage use
On our belief, that all
"God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just."

LITTLE MONSTER!
BRIAN-- PLEASE, NOT AGAIN--
LOOK AT HIM!
WITH HIS FILTHY MUTANT BRAIN!
SITTING THERE, LIKE BUTTER WOULDN'T MELT--READING PARADISE LOST!
HE'S THREE YEARS OLD, REBECCA! THREE!
HE'S ONLY LOOKING AT THE PICTURES--
--BRIAN!
FOR GOD'S SAKE, BRUCE JUST WANTS TO LEARN!
YES. HE'S LEARNING, THE LITTLE M-MONSTER.
LEARNING TO REPLACE ME.

HMM? IS THAT IT, BRUCE? YOU WANT KNOWLEDGE? WANT TO KNOW WHAT I KNOW?
IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT, BOY! ALL OF THIS!
IF I PUNISH YOU, IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT--
BRIAN! GOD, YOU'RE GETTING WORSE!
I--I THINK I SHOULD TAKE BRUCE TO YOUR SISTER'S FOR A WHILE--JUST A WEEK OR TWO--
YOU...WANT TO...?
NO! WHATEVER ELSE HE IS, H-HE'S STILL MY SON!
MINE!
AND HE NEEDS HIS FATHER!
EVERY BOY NEEDS A FATHER...
HE NEEDS ME


NOW.
THEY ALL DO. I CAN FEEL IT.
THEY'RE IN TROUBLE. THEY NEED ME.
THE INNER WORLD.
BUT I'M TRAPPED.
LOCKED DOWN AND BURIED, LIKE I WAS WHEN BANNER WAS SCARED OF ME... BUT IT'S WORSE.
SOMEONE ELSE DID THIS. WHEN XEMNU ATTACKED US--SOMEONE USED THAT TO GET PAST OUR DEFENSES.
OPENED UP BANNER'S MINDSCAPE, THE INNER WORLD IN OUR HEAD--BUILT A PRISON IN IT. A PRISON FOR ME.
AND NOW HE'S OUT THERE. JUST OUT OF REACH.
HURTING BANNER.
HURTING THE BIG GUY.

I TAKE THAT PERSONAL.
PSST. HEY.
YEARS AGO.
HEY, BIG GUY. I HEAR YOU, KID.
I LOVE YOU. I'LL ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU.
HE'S NOT YOUR DAD. NOT A GOOD DAD. A DAD CAN'T HURT YOU AND BE A GOOD DAD.
JUST LET ME OUT, OKAY?
LET ME OUT AND I'LL KILL HIM.
DON'T WANNA.
DON'T WANNA.
DADDY.

NOW.

HE SPEAKS!

THAT WAS QUITE A LASER YOU TOOK TO THE *BRAIN*, HULK. I'M IMPRESSED YOU DIDN'T *DIE*.

STILL-- *BETTER* THIS WAY, I THINK. I CAN JUST TAKE THE PARTS OF YOU I *NEED*...

H-HULK... HULK WANT...

WANT *DADDY*...

EH? WHAT WAS THAT? WANT *DADDY*?

DADDY'S RIGHT *HERE*--

--SEE?

WHUDD

"WANT *DADDY*." HA.

I HOPE YOU'RE TAKING *NOTES*, LEONARD...

OH, GREAT. HE GOT *SALAD-BRAIN.*
BANNER, WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING TO MAKE ME *PUNY* IN HERE, YOU NEED TO STOP DOIN' IT *RIGHT NOW...*
I KEEP *TELLING* YOU, JOE--WHATEVER'S GOING ON WITH YOU, IT'S NOT *MY* DOING.
I DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF *CONTROL* OVER OUR "MINDSCAPE"--
YOU *SURE?* 'CAUSE THE OTHER OPTIONS AIN'T GREAT.
WHAT ARE YOU--
TAKE A LOOK.
OH.
*THERE'S* A FAMILIAR FOREHEAD.

SAMUEL STERNS. THE LEADER...
CORRECT.
AND IN YOUR MIND... I'M THE STRONGEST THERE IS.
SO WHAT'S THE SKINNY? HOW'D YOU GET IN OUR HEAD THIS DEEP?
IF IT WAS THAT EASY, YOU'DA DONE IT YEARS AGO--
HA! NO FLIES ON JOE FIXIT!
YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE. THAT POWERFUL, NEURO-ATYPICAL MIND OF YOURS...YOU DON'T MAKE IT EASY.
SO THIS TIME...I USED A BACK DOOR.
A GREEN DOOR.
THE BELOW-PLACE.
YES.
YES, I THOUGHT THAT'D GET YOUR ATTENTION...

SHADOW BASE SITE G.
I THOUGHT THAT'D GET YOUR ATTENTION...
DON'T TRY TO TALK, OKAY?
LORD, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, RICK...?
ONE MOMENT. SOMEONE ELSE IS TALKING.
IT'S DISTRACTING, LOOKING THROUGH SO MANY DOORS AT ONCE. TWO WAS FINE...
BUT THREE...
THREE WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
DR. McGOWAN--

--HE GOT OUT! OUT OF HIS TUBE!
WHAT? WHAT DID YOU--
I SAID THE FIRST--
NO--
NNAEEIIGKK--
SSSSSSSSS
SHE SAID, "THE FIRST GOT OUT OF HIS TUBE."
AS IN YOUR FIRST RESEARCH SUBJECT--DEL FRYE, THE RADIOACTIVE UNKILLABLE CORPSE
WHO I NOW CONTROL--AS I CONTROL POOR RICK JONES.
THANKS FOR KEEPING DEL IN SUCH GOOD CONDITION, BY THE WAY.
HEH. REMEMBER HOW THAT APPEALED TO MY SOFTER SIDE?

A LIE. I HAVE NO SOFTER SIDE.
BUT... I LIKED THE SCIENCE.
YOU COULD SURVIVE THIS, DOCTOR. WE COULD ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS, YOU AND I.
YOU'VE WORKED WITH MONSTERS BEFORE.
I...
...I WON'T AGAIN.
GO TO HELL.
OH, DOCTOR.
I'M ALREADY THERE...
...WAIT, WAIT, WAIT! HOLD EVERYTHING.
SAMSON! GET OVER HERE, YOU'LL WANT TO SEE THIS--

I HAVE OTHER PLANS.
WHAT...?
AAUUU
EUURR
AAHRR-- S-S-SAAAHH...
...SAMMSUNNN...
EMERGENCY PROTOCOL SETUP.
VOICE CONTROL ON.
SSSAM...
...SON...!
SAMSON!

INITIATE LOCKDOWN!
EVACUATION PROTOCOL!
ALL PERSONNEL. EVACUATE SITE.
EVACUATE. EVACUATE.
READY TRANSLOCATION TO EVACUATION SITE--
--FOCUS ON USER COORDINATES--
EVACUATE.
--SIX-FOOT RADIUS.
YOU LIKE THIS SCIENCE?
WHAT...?
INITIATE TRANSLOCATION.
EVACUATE.
EVACUATE.
EVACUATE.

EEEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH
HA!
NOT SO EASY AS YOU FIGURED, HUH?
LET'S NOT ANTAGONIZE HIM, JOE--
G-GOOD... GOOD ADVICE.
I JUST FELT MYSELF BEING SLICED IN HALF AT THE MOLECULAR LEVEL, FIXIT. AFTER HEALING A TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY.
I'M IN NO MOOD.
HEY-- LEAVE HIM ALONE--

I WANTED TO TAKE THIS SLOW, BANNER. MAKE YOU SUFFER. BUT WE CAN'T ALWAYS HAVE THE LITTLE LUXURIES.
YOU'RE BEATEN. YOUR BODY IS INJURED, YOUR ALTERS ARE CAPTIVE, YOUR ALLIES ARE SCATTERED.
TIME FOR THE NEXT PHASE.
TIME FOR WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU DOING--?
OPENING A DOOR, OF COURSE.
LET'S GO SEE YOUR FATHER.
NO! NO, PLEASE--LET ME GO--
HELP ME-- SOMEBODY HELP--
I HEAR YOU, KID.
I LOVE YOU.
BOOM

...
WHAT... WHAT IS THAT...?
HEH. YOU DON'T KNOW?
FOR A GENIUS, YOU'RE AN IDIOT, STERNS.
I'LL ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU.
NO.
IT'S NOT POSSIBLE.
IN THE MIND, I'M THE STRONGEST.
I SEALED YOU AWAY-- I BURIED YOU--
THOOM

I BURIED YOU--
YEAH.
BURIED ME AND LEFT ME TO ROT.
BUT THEN YOU MADE A MISTAKE.
I'VE BEEN BURIED BEFORE, AND IT GOT ME MAD.
BUT ONLY SO MAD.
BUT THEN... THEN YOU HURT THE BIG GUY.
AND YOU HURT BANNER.
I... STAY BACK...
YOU HURT BANNER, STERNS.
AND WHEN YOU HURT BANNER...

# NOT JUST, NOT GOD

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**"I WAS BORN IN HELL, AND LOOK TO IT, FOR SOME OF YOU SHALL BE MY FATHER."**

– CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE
*THE TRAGICAL HISTORY OF DOCTOR FAUSTUS*, ACT II, SCENE 3

THE BELOW-PLACE. THEN.
DR. BANNER-- MAY I CALL YOU BRIAN? I'M A HUGE FAN. APOLOGIES FOR NOT STEPPING IN--BUT I NEEDED THE DATA.
AND YOU WERE VERY CLOSE. I THINK ALL YOU REALLY NEED FOR THE NEXT ATTEMPT...IS PROPER LEADERSHIP.
TAKE MY HAND.
WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
DID YOU OPEN A GREEN DOOR IN THE LIVING WORLD? THE WORLD ABOVE?
JUST AS YOU DID, BRIAN.
ONE PART CONCENTRATED GAMMA, ONE PART OCCULT KNOWLEDGE. MIX AND SERVE.
OF COURSE, MY GAMMA WAS GENERATED IN A LAB. YOU DIDN'T HAVE ONE OF THOSE.

RELEASING GAMMA STOLEN FROM THE HULK INSTEAD? AT THE ORIGINAL GAMMA BOMB TEST SITE?
I HAVE TO SAY--IT WAS INSPIRING.
AND WATCHING YOU POSSESS AND MANIPULATE GAMMA MUTATES...EVEN NUDGING THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM...
AFFECTING UP THERE FROM DOWN HERE...
I HAVE TO KNOW HOW, BRIAN. BECAUSE I CAN DO THINGS LIKE THAT... BUT YOU?
YOU'RE NOT QUITE THE RIGHT SHADE OF GREEN FOR IT.
I...I WAS BEING USED. BY SOMETHING...BEYOND COMPREHENSION...
BELOW ALL...
AH, YES. I THINK I'VE MET HIM.
ALL I WANTED WAS TO LEAVE HERE. TO GET AWAY FROM IT.
IT...IT NEEDS A PERSONALITY TO WORK THROUGH, YOU SEE.
A MIND AND SOUL TO WEAR, LIKE A MASK ON A STAGE...BECAUSE IT HAS NO MIND OF ITS OWN.
ONLY DESIRES.
TERRIBLE DESIRES.

WELL...WE ALL WANT THINGS, BRIAN. THE KEY TO COLLABORATION IS DECIDING WHAT WE ALL WANT-- AND WHAT WE'LL PAY.
YOU, FOR INSTANCE, WANT TO ESCAPE ALL THIS...
...AND I WANT TO TAKE YOUR PLACE.
YOU DO...?
WHY NOT? YOU'RE IN A POSITION OF POWER. I LIKE POWER.
YOU...YOU CAN MAKE ME ALIVE AGAIN...?
IN A SENSE... BUT WE CAN DISCUSS THAT LATER.
H-HOW? WHAT--WHAT WOULD I HAVE TO PAY?
A SMALL THING.
JUST TAKE MY HAND.

N-NO--

NO, NO-- S-STOP--

STOP!

SORRY, BRI.

BUT I NEED TO KNOW WHAT *YOU* KNOW ABOUT THE *GREEN DOOR.*

I NEED YOUR *CONNECTION* WITH THE *ONE BELOW ALL.*

I NEED THAT *MIND* OF YOURS... *SWALLOWED WHOLE...*

...AND *DIGESTED.*

NO... PLEASE...

I DON'T WANT TO BE *YOU...*

GLPP!

TOO BAD.

*DELICIOUS.*

*GENIUS,* VIOLENT *PARANOIA,* JUST A HINT OF *NARCISSISM...*

MORE THAN THAT--I SHARE YOUR GOALS. UNLIKE BRIAN, I COMPREHEND THEIR SCOPE.
TO BE THE ONE REMAINING PRESENCE IN THE MULTIVERSE...TO DESTROY UNTIL THERE IS NOTHING LEFT BUT YOU...
I'VE SEEN IT HAPPEN.
YOU BEAR MY MARK
...MY COMPLIMENTS TO THE CHEF!

BRIAN UNDERSTOOD ONE THING-- YOU NEED BANNER HERE. HIS GAMMA CONNECTION IS THE STRONGEST.
YOU NEED HIM BROKEN.
AND I KNOW HOW.
HERE, WATCH THIS--
TA-DA!
WHY, I KNOW MY BOY BETTER THAN HE KNOWS HIMSELF!
AREN'T I HIS FATHER?
BREAKING HIM MEANS INFILTRATING HIS CIRCLE. BECOMING HIS BEST FRIEND, IF I HAVE TO.
TEARING DOWN ANY SUPPORT SYSTEM HE BUILDS FOR HIMSELF.
AT THE CORE, THOUGH...HE'S HIS OWN SUPPORT SYSTEM. HIM AND THE HULK-- THE HULKS, PLURAL.
SO... WE TAKE THAT SYSTEM APART.
VIA THE GREEN DOOR--IN A FORM HE WON'T SUSPECT.
ONCE I'M IN HIS MINDSCAPE...

"...I'M THE STRONGEST THERE IS."

NOW.

S-STAY BACK--

INSIDE BRUCE BANNER'S MINDSCAPE.

HA! BEG SOME MORE, STERNS!

I LOVE IT!

KRAKOOM

CAREFUL--

I--I HAVEN'T SEEN DEVIL HULK THIS ANGRY SINCE--

--SINCE I WAS A CHILD--

AIN'T IT GREAT? C'MON, SNAKE EYES! TAKE HIM OUT!

KILL HIM!

DON'T.

STOP. IT--IT'S ME.

HE--HE AIN'T CONTROLLING ME NO MORE--

I CAN SMELL A LIE, STERNS--REMEMBER? I KNOW IT'S YOU.

AND EVEN IF I DIDN'T--

--I WOULDN'T CARE.
YOU--YOU WANT THE TRUTH--?
THIS IS THE TRUTH! I'M YOUR FATHER!
YOUR FATHER, BOY!
NO. YOU-- YOU'RE NOT HIM--IT'S A TRICK--
WHERE'S THE LIE? WHERE IS IT?
STERNS MADE ME PART OF HIM! JUST LIKE I'M PART OF YOU! LIKE I'LL ALWAYS BE PART OF YOU!
WHERE DO YOU GET IT FROM, SON? WHERE DO YOU GET IT FROM?
I SAW IT WHEN BETTY LEFT! WHEN BRUCE TRIED TO STOP HER--BY HURTING HER!
TELL ME, BOY!
TELL ME WHERE THE LIE IS!
NO... NO, IT'S NOT...

IT'S NOT TRUE! I'LL NEVER BE LIKE YOU! I'LL KILL YOU FIRST!
I'LL KILL YOU!
DON'T.
DO IT, THEN!
DO IT!
DON'T WANNA.
YOU ALMOST HAD ME, BRUCE. I ADMIT IT.
YOUR PRIVATE DEVIL ALMOST HAD ME SCARED.
BUT YOU KILLED YOUR FATHER ONCE-- AND LOOK.

LOOK AT THE HOLD I HAVE ON YOU.
ARRH--
SO WE'LL KILL YOU AGAIN.
AND IF THEY CAN'T, I WILL--
LISTEN TO YOURSELF. YOU CAN'T KILL ME, MONSTER--YOU LEAST OF ALL.
NOT WHEN YOU'RE STILL ON YOUR LEASH.
DON'T--
--DON'T WANT--
HEY! SNAKIN' STEVENS!
WATCH YER BACK--

NO! LEMME GO, KID!
I CAN FINISH HIM! I CAN KILL HIM-- IF YOU JUST LET ME LOOSE!
HULK...NOT WANT THAT. NEVER WANTED THAT...
NOT DADDY DEAD... JUST...
...JUST TO LOVE HULK. PLEASE.
JUST LOVE HULK.
...OH, KID.
NO.
THE BOY MADE HIS CHOICE--LONG AGO. DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE SURPRISED.
YOUR LOVE BURNED LIKE THE FIRES OF HELL. SO STRONG AND FIERCE, IT TERRIFIED HIM. HE KNEW YOU'D DO ANYTHING TO PROTECT HIM.
HE HAD YOUR LOVE, UNCONDITIONALLY AND FOREVER.

BUT WE WANT WHAT WE *CAN'T* HAVE.

AND YOU WERE *NEVER* HIS FATHER.

THIS AIN'T *DONE*, STERNS.

THIS AIN'T--

EAARGGH!

I'M SORRY, "DEVIL HULK."

BUT IT *IS*.

NO.

NO.

*DONE.*

NO!
HULK NOT *WANT* THIS! NOT WANT *ANYONE* TO DIE!
H-HULK-- HULK ONLY WANTED--
YES.
YOU *WANTED.*
AND YOU *PAID* FOR WHAT YOU WANTED--SO DON'T *WORRY*, BOY, I WON'T *CHEAT* YOU.
HERE IS YOUR *REWARD.*
"I LOVE YOU."
YOU STUPID, STUPID CHILD.

NO--
STOP--
WE'RE ALREADY BEHIND SCHEDULE, BRUCE. TIME RUNS, THE CLOCK WILL STRIKE, THE DEVIL WILL COME.
OR HE WOULD IF HE COULD.
DON'T! DON'T LET HIM DO THIS!
JOE!
NO-- HULK NOT--
--HULK NOT WANT THIS!
YOU--WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?
WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?
IT...IT HAPPEN TOO FAST...HULK ONLY WANTED TO STOP FIGHT...
NOT WANT THIS...HULK NOT WANT THIS...

OUTSIDE BRUCE BANNER'S MIND.
HULK NOT WANT THIS.
THE ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
NONE OF US DO, EH?
BUT YOU LET OFF A GAMMA BLAST THAT DESTROYED A TOWN, AND GAMMA FLIGHT HAD TO SHOOT YOU THROUGH THE HEAD TO STOP YOU.
SO NOW...
...NOW WE HAVE TO DO THINGS WE DON'T WANT TO.
BEAUTIFUL WORK, SALAD BRAIN.
DEVIL'S DEAD-- BANNER'S BEEN TAKEN TO HELL--
--AND YOU AND ME ARE CHAINED UP IN SPACE JAIL! WHAT NOW, GENIUS?
WHERE THE HELL DO WE GO FROM HERE?

JOE?
IS THAT YOU?
ARE YOU THERE?
I NEED HELP, JOE.
I CAN'T SEE.
SOMETHING'S EATING ME.
I THINK...

# THE STARS MOVE STILL

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“WHO COULD HAVE BOUND THE LAMB TO THE WOLF, AND, WHAT WAS STILL MORE INCOMPREHENSIBLE, HAVE ATTACHED THE WOLF TO THE LAMB?”

– VICTOR HUGO,
*LES MISÉRABLES*

ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
MM-HMM, MM-HMM...
WHERE THE SUN...NEVER SHINES...
SUSPENDED ANIMATION LOUNGE.
I SHIVER WHEN THE COLD WINDS BLOW...
HOW'S THINGS IN THE DEEP FREEZE THERE, DR. LANGKOWSKI? NOT MUCH GOIN' ON RIGHT NOW, I'LL BET.
ALTHOUGH... HUH. THEM READINGS...
THEY ARE LOOKIN' MIGHTY STRANGE--
CRKK
AW, NO.
CRKK-CRKK
CRRRKK

SO. HULK WOKE UP.
RECREATION ROOM.
HE SEEMS DIFFERENT, THOUGH, EH? DIMINISHED. LIKE THE BATTLE TOOK SOMETHING VITAL OUT OF HIM.
AND, OF COURSE, HE'S REACTING LIKE A CHILD, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT HE IS.
HE DOESN'T EVEN UNDERSTAND THAT HE BLEW UP A TOWN...
YEAH, YEAH. I FEEL ENOUGH LIKE A COP AS IT IS WITHOUT YOU RUBBIN' IT IN, JUDD...
I'M NOT CONVINCED HE DID BLOW UP GEORGEVILLE--
AND YOU CAN KNOCK IT OFF TOO, McGEE. YOU GOT YER STORY--WHY'D YOU EVEN COME BACK WITH US...?
QUIET, CARL. I WANNA HEAR WHAT SHE'S GOT TO SAY.
RICK JONES.
WHEN HE ATTACKED TITANIA AND ME, HE WAS SMILING. TALKING TO HIMSELF.
BODY LIKE A PRETZEL, AND HE WAS GIVING THIS SMUG LITTLE SPEECH...
INSANITY? HIS MIND COULDN'T TAKE IT?
MAYBE.
BUT...THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE. BEFORE YOU ARRIVED.

YOU'VE SEEN THE NEWS FOOTAGE--HULK GETS MAD FOR A SECOND. A SCARY SECOND. BUT THEN IT PASSES.
EVERYONE BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF--INCLUDING ME.
"...AND THEN... ALONG COMES JONES."
IT'S ALL GOING TO BE FINE.
TWO SECONDS LATER, HULK'S SCREAMING IN PAIN. TWO SECONDS AFTER THAT--HE EXPLODES.
I'VE BEEN A BROKEN RECORD ON THIS--SAYING HE DIDN'T DO IT ON PURPOSE--
--BUT I THINK IT'S WORSE. I THINK SOMEONE DID IT TO HIM.
RICK JONES DID IT TO HIM--
NOT QUITE.
IT WASN'T RICK.

IT WAS THE *LEADER.*

A GENIUS *GAMMA MUTATE* WITH THE POWER TO CONTROL *MINDS* AND INHABIT *BODIES.*

AND I SUSPECT *THAT* IS SOMEHOW CONNECTED TO...

...WELL, *THIS* WHOLE SITUATION.

*WALTER?*

DEAR GOD, IS THAT *YOU...?*

AGAIN-- NOT QUITE.

IT'S *LEONARD* IN HERE, PUCK. LEONARD *SAMSON.*

BUT I GUESS YOU CAN CALL ME *DOC SASQUATCH.*

THE HOLDING FACILITY.

SIR--HE'S DANGEROUS--

I'VE GOT *YOU* WITH ME, HAVEN'T I? YOU'RE *ARMED*, AREN'T YOU?

BESIDES--WE'RE *OLD FRIENDS.*

MAYBE HE EVEN *REMEMBERS* ME.

THE NAME'S *HENRY PETER GYRICH*, MONSTER. I'M *ACTING COMMANDER* OF THE *ALPHA FLIGHT INTERSTELLAR DEFENSE AND DIPLOMACY INITIATIVE--*

--INCLUDING THE *GAMMA FLIGHT* PROGRAM FOR MONITORING *GAMMA MUTATES.*

BIG WORDS.

HULK NOT *UNDERSTAND...*

THEN I'LL MAKE IT *SIMPLE* FOR YOU.

I'M THE *GOVERNMENT*, MISTER.

THAT MEANS *I* DECIDE WHAT HAPPENS TO *YOU.*

BRUCE BANNER'S MINDSCAPE.
...OKAY, DO WE KNOW THIS CREEP?
HE'S REAL FAMILIAR FROM SOMEWHERE...
HULK NOT SURE. MAYBE HULK MET HIM... OR OTHER HULK...
PUNY BANNER WOULD KNOW.
WELL, PUNY BANNER AIN'T HERE, IS HE? PUNY BANNER GOT YANKED RIGHT OUT OF OUR HEAD AND DRAGGED DOWN TO HELL!
BY SAM STERNS, OF ALL PEOPLE! HOW DID MELON-HEAD GET THAT KIND OF POWER?
HE JUST BREAKS INTO OUR HEAD AND KIDNAPS PART OF US? HELL, HE KILLED PART OF US!
HOW DOES THAT EVEN WORK?
STOP YELLING.
AND THAT REMINDS ME, I FORGOT THE BEST PART! STERNS IS SOMEHOW ALSO OUR DAD!
AND WHEN IT ALL WENT DOWN, YOU WERE ON DAD'S SIDE--
HULK SAID STOP! STOP YELLING!
STOP YELLING AT HULK!

YOU'RE CRYING?
TEARS WON'T HELP YOU NOW, MONSTER--
SIR--THERE'S SOME KIND OF COMMOTION IN THE REC ROOM--
GO DEAL WITH IT AND REPORT BACK.
THAT CONTAINMENT SYSTEM USES YOUR OWN FORCE AGAINST YOU, HULK--YOU CAN'T BREAK IT.
AS YOU SHIFT IN SIZE, THE MANACLES WILL TOO...
AND DON'T THINK ABOUT CHANGING BACK TO BANNER TO ESCAPE EITHER.
...
WAIT, "SHIFT IN SIZE"?
THIS GUY... THIS GUY AIN'T KEPT UP, HAS HE?
WANNA SHOW HIM HOW WE DO THINGS DOWNTOWN?

HKK.

HRRKK!

HH

STAY BEHIND ME, SIR--

WHAT...

WHAT *IS* THIS...?

SHRRP

SO...

...I'M GUESSING YOU AIN'T BEEN *AROUND* IN A WHILE, HAVE YA, GYRICH?

WE MADE A FEW *CHANGES* AROUND HERE.

GET THAT OUTTA MY FACE, PAL. YER STANDIN' TOO CLOSE.
DON'T-- DON'T YOU MOVE, BANNER--
GHOOMM
I AIN'T BANNER.
KRAK
AN' I TOLDJA YOU WERE STANDIN' TOO CLOSE.
GOOD GOD--
YEAH, YEAH--
WHOKK
UNNH!
OKAY, DECISION TIME, SALAD-BRAIN.
DO WE WANNA GO WITH SMART, OR DO WE WANNA GO WITH STRETCHY?

HOW'S ROMESH? I THINK I GAVE HIM QUITE A FRIGHT BACK IN THE SUSPENDED ANIMATION ROOM WHEN I, AH... SASQUATCHED OUT...
OH, HE'S MAD AT YOU. TOLD ME YOU SCARED HIM OUT OF A YEAR'S GROWTH.
I'M NOT SO HAPPY EITHER, EH?
WE KNOW YOU COME BACK, SAMSON. I'M PRETTY SURE I'VE BEEN WHERE YOU COME BACK FROM.
WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS WHY YOU CAME BACK TO WALT'S BODY THIS TIME--AND WHERE WALT MIGHT BE.
I NEVER FULLY REMEMBER THE OTHER SIDE, EUGENE. BUT IF I FOUND WALTER'S GREEN DOOR THIS TIME...
...IT MUST MEAN MINE WAS SOMEHOW INACCESSIBLE.
THE LEADER'S INVOLVED. HE WAS IN DEL FRYE'S BODY WHEN DEL KILLED ME--HE WAS RICK TOO, I'M CERTAIN.
BUT WE WON'T GET THE FULL PICTURE ON ANY OF THIS UNTIL WE TALK TO...
...AH.
HELLO, BRUCE.
WHAT'S WITH THE GUN?

I AIN'T BRUCE, THAT'S WHAT.
THAT YOU IN THERE, SAMSON?
JOE FIXIT, EVERYONE. ONE OF BRUCE'S ALTERS.
THOUGH HE'S HAIRIER THAN HE USED TO BE...
LOOK WHO'S TALKIN'.
HA!
IT'S GOOD NEWS. JOE'S ACTUALLY VERY REASONABLE THESE DAYS.
MUCH MORE THAN HE USED TO BE--
SURE.
THAT'S ME ALL OVER.
REASONABLE.
NO--
CHOOM
KRI-I-SSSH

ATMOSPHERIC BREACH!
I'VE GOT YOU--
CORRIDOR 17, SECTION THREE! SEAL IT OFF!
NOW!
THE DOCKER
...YOU GOTTA BE KIDDIN' ME!
WE'RE ON A SPACE STATION WITH GUNS THAT BREAK THE WINDOWS?
THAT'S IT. I'M DONE
PARDON OR NO PARDON. I QUIT.
C'MON, BABY. YOU SCARED OF A LITTLE AIRLESS SPACE?

"WHAT'S THAT TO FOLKS LIKE US?"
"HE'S FALLING..."

...CAUGHT IN EARTH'S GRAVITY.
BLAST IT, JOE...
DON'T BREATHE TOO HARD ON THAT GLASS OR WE'LL ALL BE OUT THERE--
CARL--
I JUST HOPE HE CAN SURVIVE RE-ENTRY IN HIS CURRENT CONDITION...
I WOULDN'T WORRY, EH?
HE'S THE HULK.
THE IMMORTAL HULK--ISN'T THAT WHAT THE PAPERS ARE CALLING HIM?
HE CAN LIVE THROUGH THIS.
"THE BEST THING WE CAN DO IS PLOT HIS TRAJECTORY...SEE WHERE HE'S GOING."

"--AND HAVE SOMEONE WAITING WHEN HE SPLASHES DOWN."
CONEY ISLAND CHANNEL.
PLOOM
WELL, AIN'T THIS A REVOLTIN' DEVELOPMENT.

HRRGH.
YOU...
ME.
FOLKS SAID YA MIGHT BE DROPPIN' IN FER A VISIT--SO WE SAID WE'D HANDLE IT.
THE OTHERS, THEY WANTED TO GRAB YA WIT' A FORCE-FIELD...OR A FRAMMISTAT...
...BUT I SAID NO.
JUST KEEP THE PERIMETER, I SAID. MAKE SURE THERE'S NO RUBBERNECKERS TO GET HURT.
AND HERE WE ARE. JUST TH' TWO OF US.
THEY ROLLED THEIR EYES A LITTLE, SURE. BUT MY TEAM KNOWS YA OWE ME A REMATCH...
...MAYBE EVEN A WHOLE DANG HONEYMOON.
BUT LOOKIN' AT YA NOW? I'M THINKIN' YOU OUGHTTA QUIT RIGHT HERE. WHILE YER AHEAD.
EVEN IF YOU DON'T TALK LIKE IT... YER A SMART COOKIE, HULKSTER.

SO HERE'S THE THING

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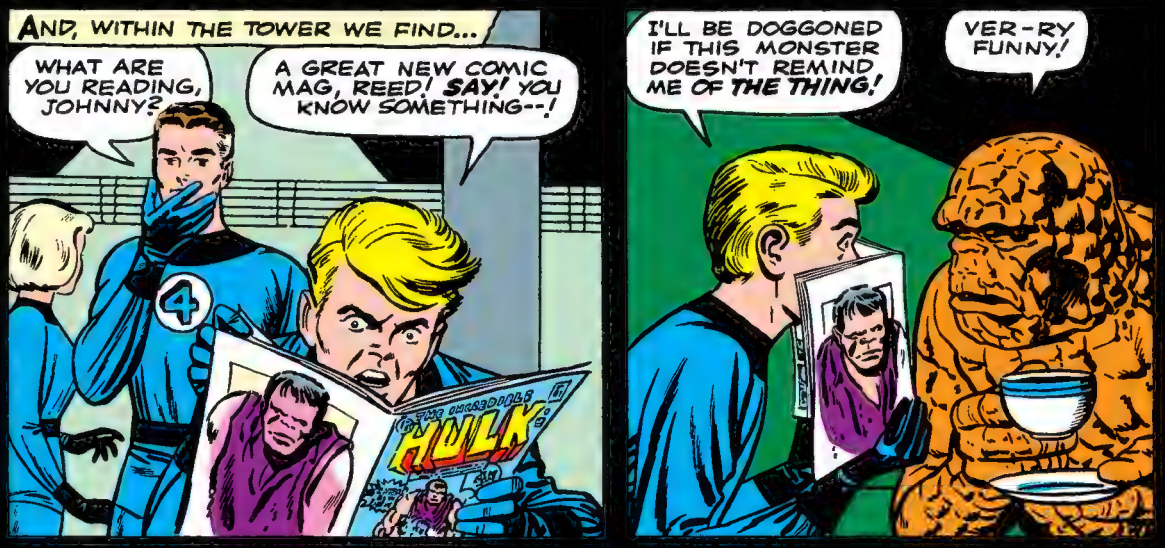



–STAN LEE & JACK KIRBY
*FANTASTIC FOUR #5*,
"PRISONERS OF DOCTOR DOOM!"

ARIZONA.
SO.
IT'S BEEN A PRETTY STRESSFUL FORTY-EIGHT HOURS.
THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT MY FELLOW SHADOW BASE SCIENTISTS PINGED THEIR DEAD DROPS. EVERYONE MADE IT OUT.
THE BAD NEWS IS... THEY'VE GONE TO GROUND. DISAPPEARED THEMSELVES.
I CAN'T BLAME THEM. IF I WERE SMART, I'D DO THE SAME.
OPEN.
STATE NAME FOR VOCAL IDENTIFICATION.
CHARLENE McGOWAN.
TAKE WHAT'S LEFT OF THE MONEY AND FIND SOMEWHERE TO HIDE.
THAT'S WHAT THIS SHOULD BE.
KLAK
SOMEWHERE TO HIDE.

THIS ISN'T EVEN AN OFFICIAL SHADOW BASE SITE--THERE AREN'T ANY LEFT. IT'S JUST A SAFE HOUSE I THREW TOGETHER WHEN I HAD THE RESOURCES.
I SHOULD BE HIDING HERE. WORKING OUT HOW TO RUN AWAY FROM THIS WHOLE MESS.
I SHOULDN'T BE WORKING OUT HOW TO FIGHT BACK.
BUT I AM.
MAYBE IT'S GUILT. MAYBE IT'S ANGER. MAYBE I'M JUST SICK OF RUNNING AND HIDING.
BUT I STILL BELIEVE IN BRUCE BANNER. I BELIEVE IN THE HULK.

AND I BELIEVE HE NEEDS HIS FRIENDS.
CONEY ISLAND.
HULK
YOU OKAY, BEN?

GHTMARE
WE'VE GOT YOU ON THE BOARDWALK...
AIN'T NOTHIN', REED. OL' JADE JAWS TRIED TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT, IS ALL.
NOT MUCH OF A HULK LEAP-- I KEPT RIGHT ON HIS TAIL, AND I AIN'T NEVER BEEN A--
WHUDD
RRAARRGH!
HULK SMASH THING!
WHOK
WHAT GIVES?
YA SWITCH UP YER BREAKFAST CEREAL OR SOMETHIN'?
NOT TO NAME DROP, BUT SPIDEY HIT ME HARDER'N YOU JUST DID--
--BACK WHEN HE WUZ FRANKLIN'S AGE!

KROOMM
WHOOPS.
UH, REED-- THE "NIGHTMARE" RIDE...THAT WUZ SCHEDULED FER DEMOLITION, RIGHT?
BEN, THE WHOLE POINT OF THIS APPROACH WAS TO KEEP THE HULK CONTAINED...
PUT ME ON.
DON'T PUT SUZIE ON! HE'S CONTAINED, I SWEAR! GOT 'IM RIGHT WHERE I WANT 'IM!
HECK, HE'S A REGULAR PUSSYCAT--AT LEAST COMPARED TO LAST TIME!
REMEMBER WHEN HE BEAT ME INTO A COMA ON MY HONEYMOON?*
NEXT TO HOW HE WUZ THEN...
...HE'S ALMOST PUNY!
*FANTASTIC FOUR (2018) #12.

SHUT UP! SHUT UP, THING!
GOTTA GO, STRETCH.
THING IS PUNY ONE! THING WAS ALWAYS PUNY NEXT TO HULK! HULK NOT PUNY!
HULK NOT--NOT WEAK!
HULK NOT!
WOW.
GUESS IT'S TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT BULLIES.
WHAPP
YER CRYIN' NOW? AFTER EVERYTHING YOU DONE, YA GET A LITTLE OF YER OWN MEDICINE AND OUT COME THE WATERWORKS?
TELL YA WHAT, MEAN GREEN--
--LEMME WIPE THEM TEARS!

H-HULK-- WILL SMASH--
SMASH YOU--
SO TAKE A SWING ALREADY!
YER JUST LIKE THE PUNKS IN THE ALLEY WHEN I WUZ A KID!
I TAKE IT BACK.
YA CAN'T EVEN DISH IT OUT.
KRUNGG
YA THINK IT'S FUN TO DISH IT OUT, BUT YA CAN'T-- OWW!
HULK SMASH--
YEAH, THAT'S YER ANSWER TO EVERYTHING! SMASH IT UP!
SMASH LIVES--SMASH COMMUNITIES! SMASH WHATEVER MAKES YOU MAD THIS WEEK!
DOIN' WHATEVER YOU WANT, 'CAUSE YER THE STRONGEST THERE IS--

WHAMM
--BUT THAT AIN'T TRUE NO MORE!
LIKE THE PUNKS IN THE ALLEY! SOMEBODY STRONGER CAME ALONG--NOW IT'S HIS TURN TO BEAT ON YOU!
YOU HEAR ME, HULK?
NOW IT'S MY--
STOP!

STOP IT!
STOP HITTING HULK!
STOP HURTING HULK...!
YER BEGGIN'? REALLY?
SHEESH. MAYBE I OUGHTTA GO EASY.
ONLY YA DIDN'T GO EASY ON THEM FOLKS IN IOWA, DIDJA?
SO MAYBE... YA DESERVE A LITTLE HURT.
IT'S CLOBBERIN'--

AARRRHHH--

--TIME--

KRACK

OH GOD-- BANNER, I'M-- I'M SORRY--

I COULDN'T PULL MY PUNCH ENOUGH--

H-HE-- HE'S--

--HE'S A KID!

HE'S A KID, YOU PIECE OF CRAP!

YER BEATIN' UP ON A KID!

I... HE...
HE HIT ME FIRST.

YEAH, OKAY.
SO, UH... IT DON'T SOUND LIKE BRUCE IS IN THERE...
AND THEY SAY RICHARDS IS THE GENIUS.
MUST BE THAT ASTRONAUT SCHOOL.

I'M GUESSIN'... YER A SMART HULK IN HIS BODY, OR SOMETHIN'...?
WHOEVER YOU ARE, WE GOTTA GET YA TO A HOSPITAL--
NOPE. NO HOSPITALS, NO COPS. WE GOT THIS.

YA GOT TWO BROKEN ARMS IS WHAT YA GOT!
YA GOTTA BE IN AGONY--
SO WHAT? SO WHAT, GRIMM?
YOU THINK I CARE?

YOU THINK ANYONE CARES?
YOU WANNA TALK PAIN--ME AN' PAIN GO WAY BACK.

WE GOT AN ARRANGEMENT.
COME ON, YA BIG GREEN--

AAAARRRH!
HOLY HANNAH--
SEE? GOOD AS NEW.
BEN? WHAT'S GOING ON?
..IT'S COMPLICATED, STRETCH.
KEEP THE COPS BACK A WHILE, WILL YA? TELL 'EM THERE'S RADIATION OR SOMETHIN'.
IT'S YOUR CALL, BEN. DON'T WORRY, WE'LL MAINTAIN THE PERIMETER.
OKAY. NOBODY'S GONNA BOTHER US FOR A WHILE.
SO.
YA WANNA GET A HOT DOG?

BIG BEEF DOG AND ALL THE EXTRAS. MADE WITH MY OWN ROCKY HANDS.
I KNOW THE GUY RUNS THIS JOINT, I CAN SETTLE UP LATER...
THAT MEAN I CAN CLEAN OUT THE REGISTER?
EAT YER HOT DOG.
SMELLS GOOD.
YEAH? YOU CAN SMELL THROUGH THAT, SERPICO?
EH. IF I'M STUCK IN BANNER'S BODY, I MIGHT AS WELL GET IT HOW I WANT IT.
LEAST UNTIL I GET THE REAL ME BACK...
LEMME CHECK THIS'LL TAKE MY WEIGHT...
WHERE IS BANNER? YA DIDN'T BUMP 'IM OFF, DIDJA?
NAH--WE WERE GETTIN' ALONG, KINDA. ACTIN' LIKE A SYSTEM, AT LEAST.
I MEAN, THAT WAS US, RIGHT? A D.I.D. SYSTEM. WE HAD TO START MAKIN' THAT WORK.
AND WE-- OH, THAT'S GOOD--
--WE WERE DOIN' IT.
THE SYSTEM WORKED.
RIGHT UP UNTIL THE LEADER CAME ALONG.

HE GOT IN OUR HEAD. TOOK BANNER--DRAGGED HIM INTO HELL. MAYBE KILLED DEVIL.
LEFT THIS... THIS EMPTY SPACE INSIDE US. I CAN'T SAY IT ANY BETTER THAN THAT-- CAN'T SAY IT SO'S YOU'D GET IT.
SOME KINDA SUPERNATURAL GAMMA WHAMMY... LIKE WHAT HE DID TO US IN IOWA...
T-SHIRTS WILSON'S TWO IN ONE HOT DOGS
SO THAT WUZ A FRAME-UP? THE LEADER DID IT?
HULK--IF I TAKE YOU IN, MAYBE THE FF CAN HELP WITH THIS--
NO.
TRUST ME, GRIMM--THIS AIN'T SOMETHIN' YOU CAN HELP WITH.
AW, YOU DON'T KNOW THAT.
STERNS VERSUS STRETCHO? THAT AIN'T NO CONTEST.
IT AIN'T BRAINS.
I HEARD YOU DIED ONCE, THAT RIGHT?
WELL, I GUESS...
YOU GO UPSTAIRS?
OR DOWNSTAIRS?
...
UPSTAIRS.
LIKE I SAID.
THIS AIN'T SOMETHIN' YOU CAN HELP WITH.

...
Y'KNOW... PRETTY SOON *AFTER* THAT... BEIN' *DEAD*...
...MEETIN' THE *MAN* UPSTAIRS...
...I STARTED GOIN' TO *TEMPLE* AGAIN.
EVEN HAD MY *BAR MITZVAH*.
"IT WUZ THIRTEEN YEARS SINCE THE *COSMIC RAYS*. BECOMING THE THING WUZ A *SECOND LIFE*--THAT'S WHAT MY RABBI SAID.
"ANYWAY, I DID A SPEECH ABOUT A PASSAGE FROM THE *TORAH*, FROM THE STORY OF *JOB*.
"YOU KNOW THE STORY OF JOB, HULK?"
SATAN--THE *ACCUSER*--TAKES *EVERYTHING* FROM JOB.
HIS HOME. HIS *FAMILY*.
EVEN HIS *BODY* AIN'T HIS NO MORE.
ALL WITH GOD'S *PERMISSION*--TO TEST JOB'S *FAITH*.
COURSE, IT'S *SATAN* WHO ASKS FOR THE TEST...

"JOB'S BUDDIES FIGURE HE DESERVES IT. THAT BAD THINGS DON'T HAPPEN TO GOOD GUYS.
"IN THE FACE OF THAT, JOB DEMANDS ANSWERS. HE WANTS TO KNOW WHY HE WAS HURT. TO SPEAK TO THE MAN UPSTAIRS.
"SO EVENTUALLY, THE ALMIGHTY COMES TO HIM.
"JOB DON'T GET NO ANSWERS. JUST A GLIMPSE OF HOW MUCH HE DOESN'T KNOW.
"OF HOW VAST GOD IS."
WHEN I STUDIED THAT PASSAGE...AT THE TIME, I'D JUST GOT RICH, AND I ACTED LIKE A REAL JERK ABOUT IT.
GUESS I FIGURED GOOD THINGS DIDN'T HAPPEN TO BAD GUYS...
SO ALL I THOUGHT WUZ:
"HEY! THINGS AIN'T SO BAD FER ME! AT LEAST I AIN'T JOB, RIGHT?"
MAYBE I SHOULDA BEEN LOOKIN' OUT FOR WHOEVER WUZ.

I ATE MY HOT DOG.
WHERE'S ALL THIS GOIN', GRIMM?
HOO BOY.
GOOD QUESTION.
WE'LL SAY YA GOT AWAY. THE OTHERS'LL GO ALONG WITH IT.
JUST DON'T MAKE ME REGRET IT.
YOU DECIDE I CAN HELP-- GIMME A CALL. YOU KNOW THE NUMBER.
AND GRAB A SHIRT OFF THE RACK, WILL YA, HULK? I'M BUYIN'.
WHAT, I GOT SOMETHIN' ON MY FACE?
...
YA KEEP CALLIN' ME HULK.
SO?
THAT'S WHO YA ARE, AIN'T IT?
IT SEEMS ALMOST WRONG, THE HULK NEEDING FRIENDS.

SHADOW BASE SITE G.
THE SEALED TRANSLOCATION LAB.
MAYBE HE DOESN'T EVEN THINK SO.
MAYBE HE LOCKS THAT NEED AWAY, DEEP INSIDE. PRETENDS WHAT HE NEEDS IS TO BE ALONE, A COMMUNITY IN HIMSELF.
OR MAYBE NOT.
MAYBE THAT'S A NEED YOU CAN'T BURY FOREVER.
EITHER WAY, HE NEEDS US--ANYONE WHO EVER THOUGHT WELL OF HIM--TO REACH OUT.
HE NEEDS TO KNOW WE'RE ALL HERE.

# THE MAN DOWNSTAIRS

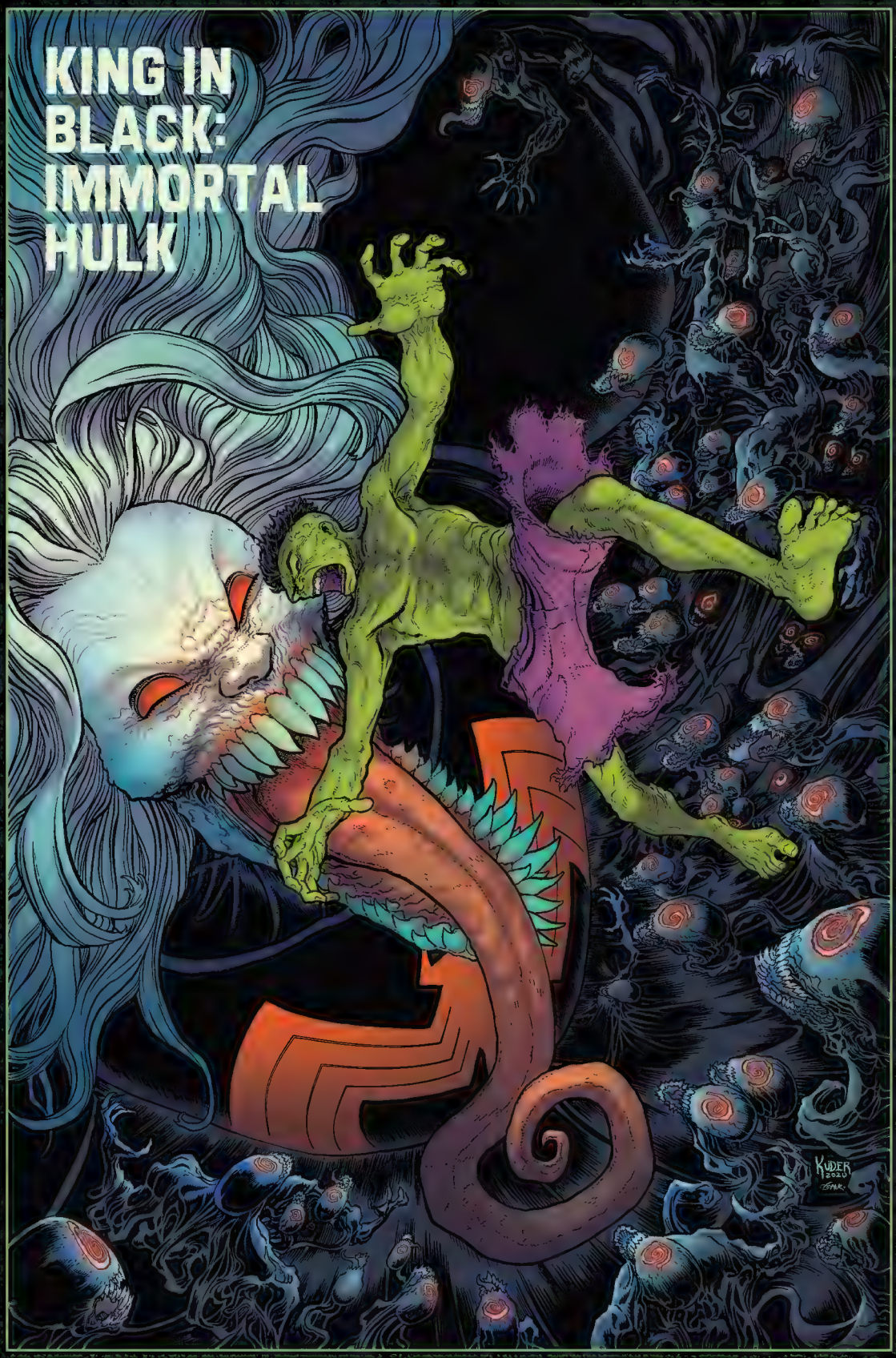
#4 FANTASTIC FOUR VARIANT BY
ARTHUR ADAMS & FRANK MARTIN

#5 COSMIC GHOST RIDER VS. VARIANT BY
RAHZZAH

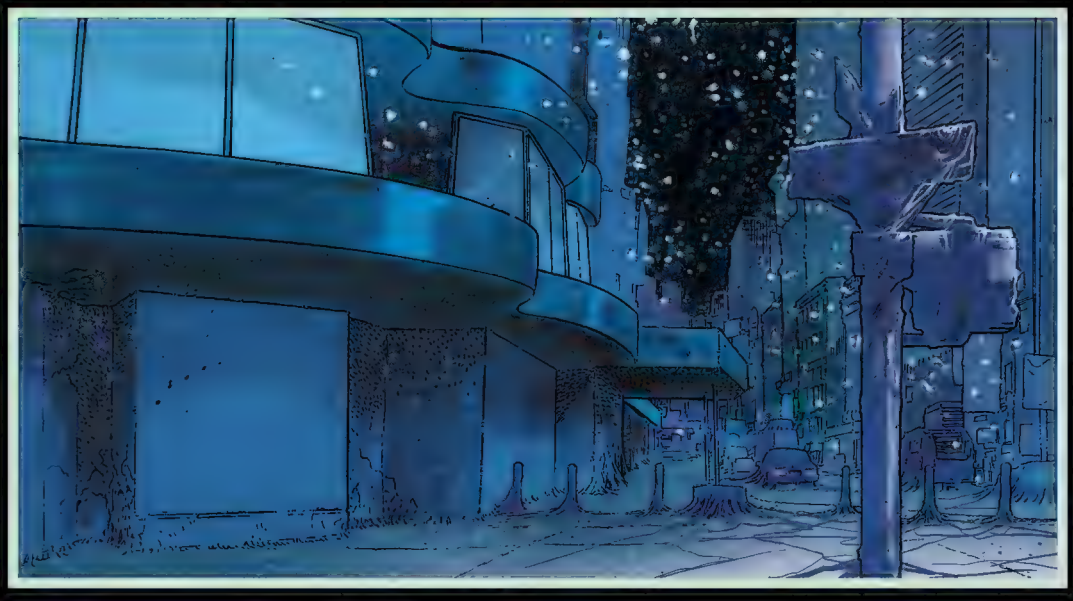
#6 COSMIC GHOST RIDER VS. VARIANT BY
BRENT SCHOONOVER & WOO DAE SHIM

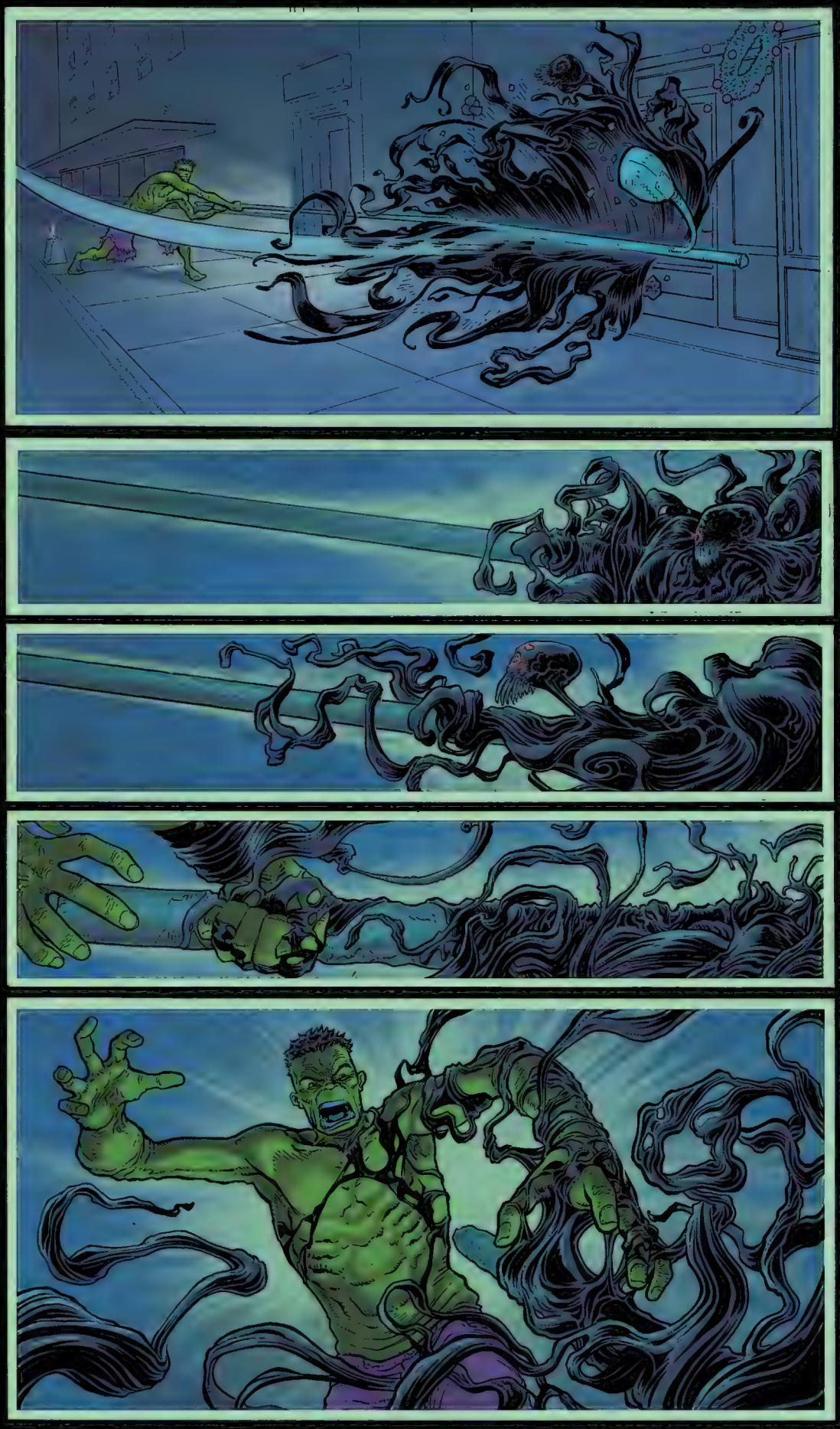
#7 MARVEL KNIGHTS 20TH ANNIVERSARY VARIANT
BY MIKE DEODATO JR. & RAIN BEREDO

KNULL, THE PRIMORDIAL AND MALICIOUS GOD OF THE SYMBIOTES, HAS ARRIVED ON EARTH WITH AN ARMY OF SYMBIOTE DRAGONS. KNULL IS THE KING IN BLACK.



'Twas the night before Christmas...

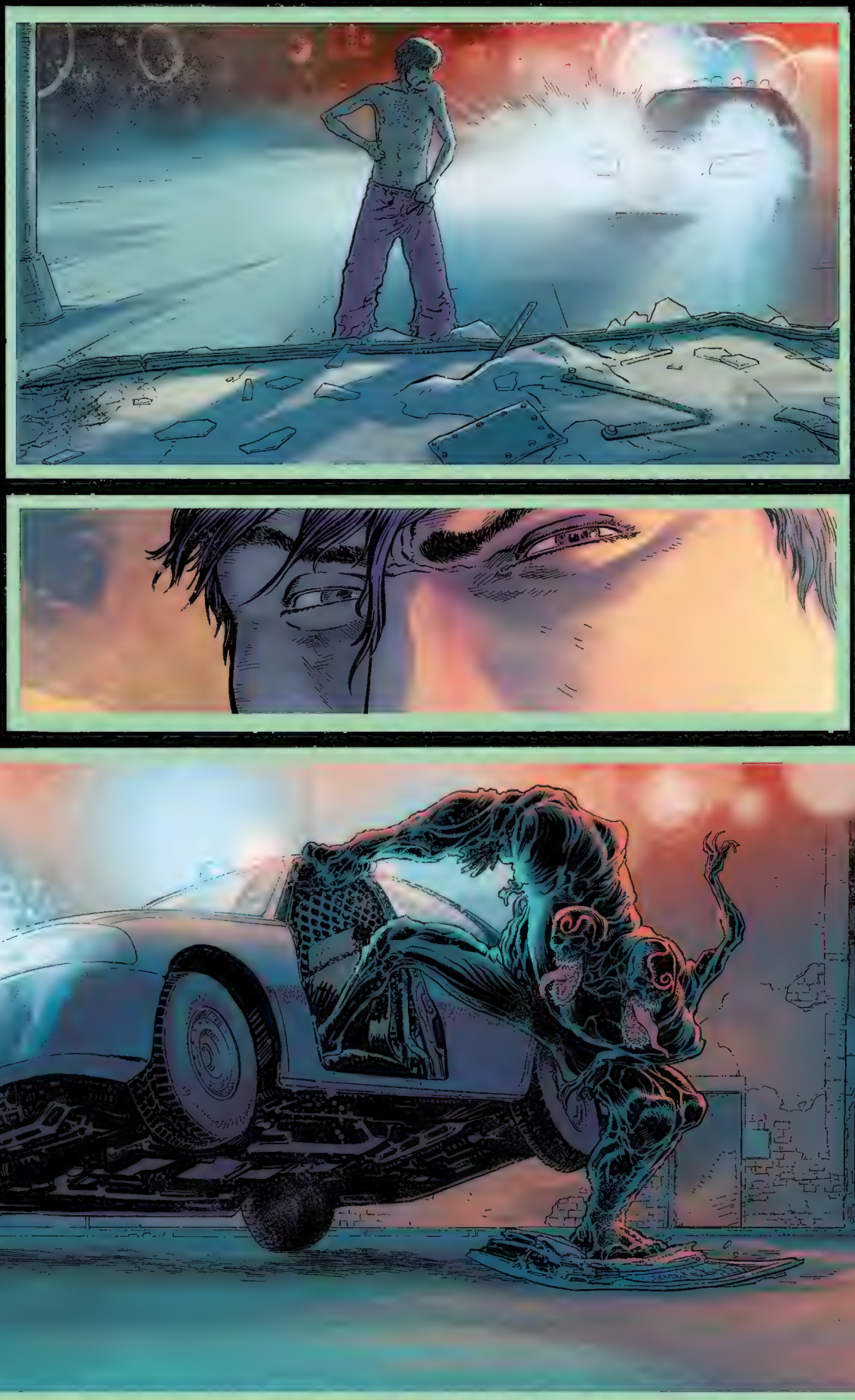


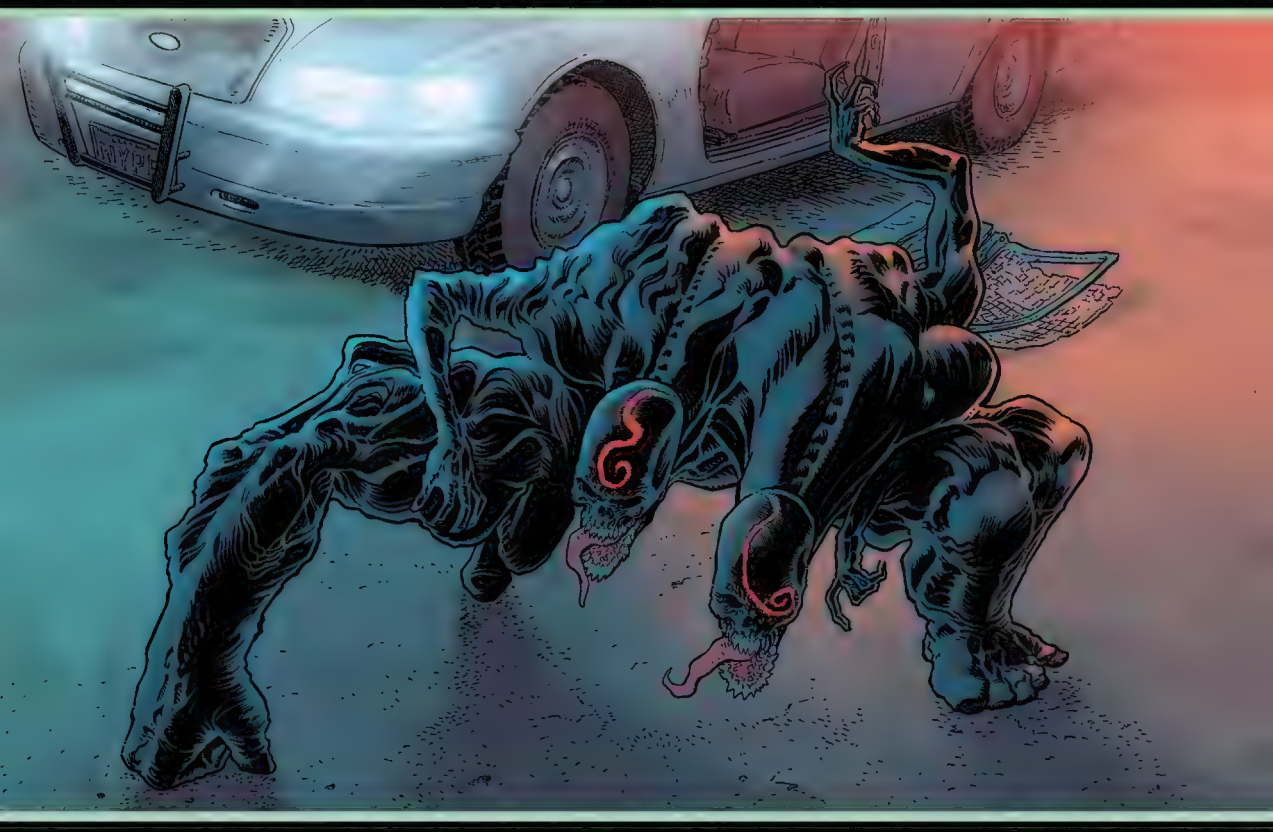


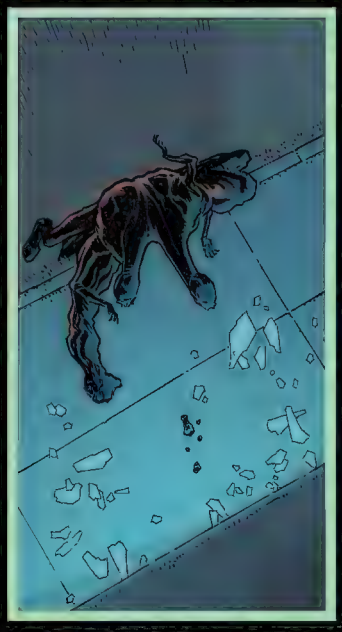
NYPD

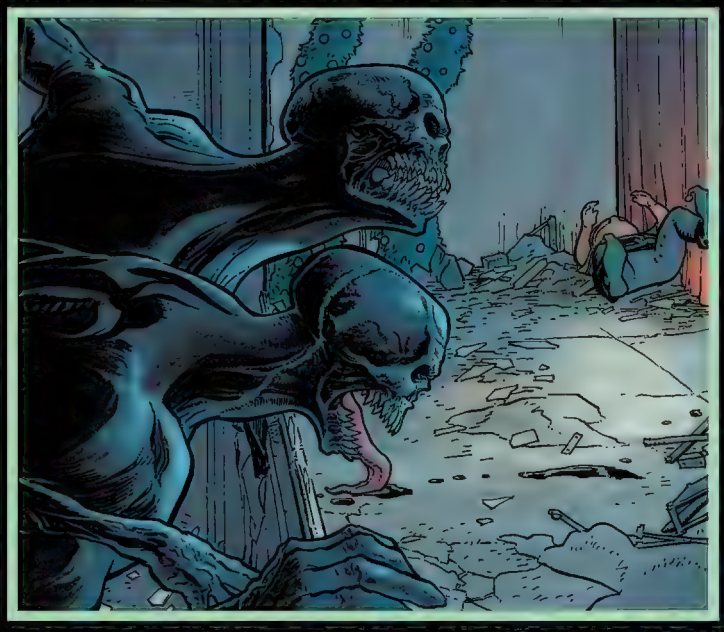
MANTLOS

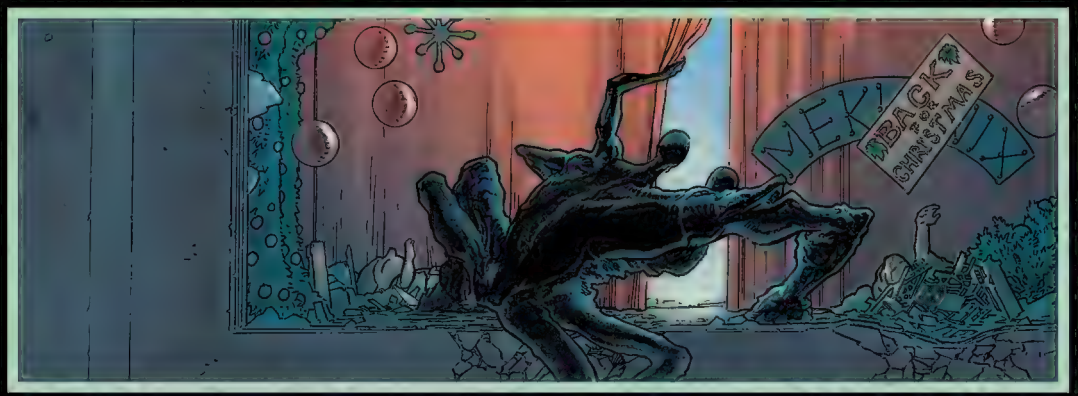
MEXICANA







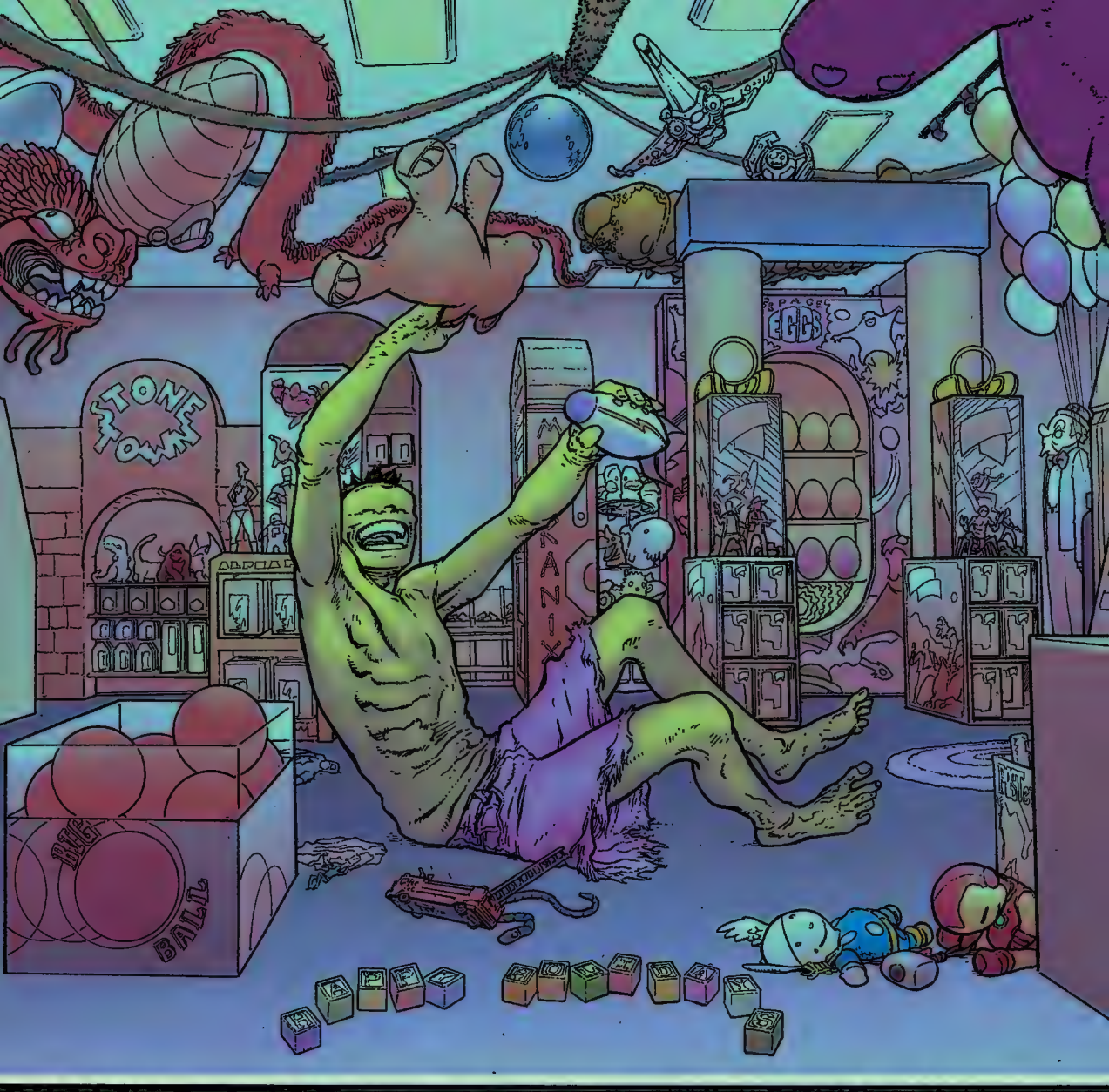



MERRY
BACK
CHRISTMAS

ELECTRONICS

PLAY
GREG LAKE
BELIEVE IN FATHER...
2:07/ 3:32
VOL: 100
SIMON

DIRECTORY




...and to all a

GOOD NIGHT.

"IF THESE SHADOWS REMAIN UNALTERED BY THE FUTURE, THE CHILD WILL DIE."

– CHARLES DICKENS, *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

*IMMORTAL HULK: THE BEST DEFENSE*
VARIANT BY ADI GRANOV

*IMMORTAL HULK: THE BEST DEFENSE*
VARIANT BY SKOTTIE YOUNG

*IMMORTAL HULK: THE BEST DEFENSE*
VARIANT BY JOE BENNETT,
BELARDINO BRABO & PAUL MOUNTS

*IMMORTAL HULK: THE BEST DEFENSE*
HIDDEN GEM VARIANT BY
JACK KIRBY & PAUL MOUNTS

42

"CONSEQUENCES ARE UNPITYING. OUR DEEDS CARRY THEIR TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES, QUITE APART FROM ANY FLUCTUATIONS THAT WENT BEFORE—CONSEQUENCES THAT ARE HARDLY EVER CONFINED TO OURSELVES."

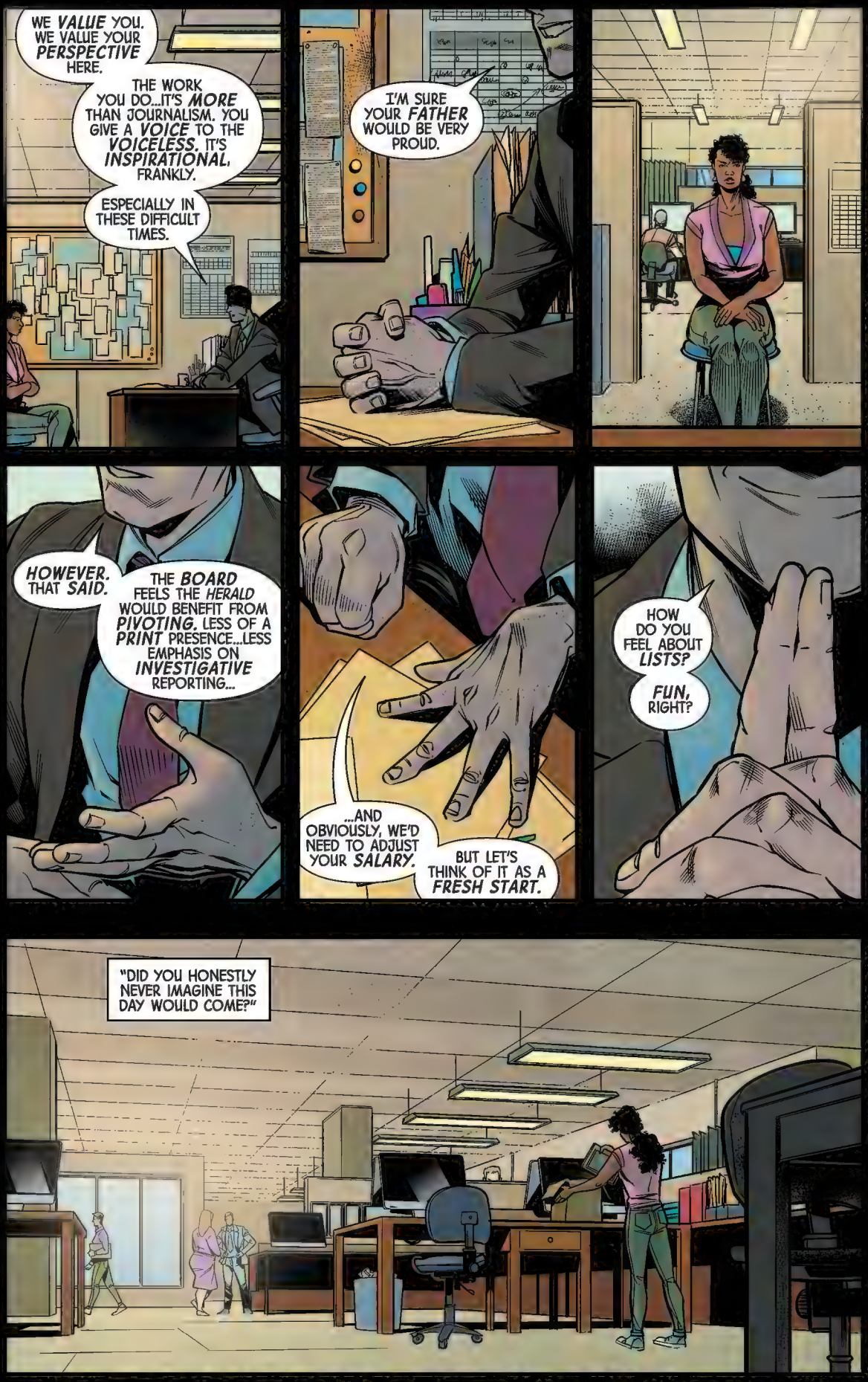
– GEORGE ELIOT,
*ADAM BEDE*

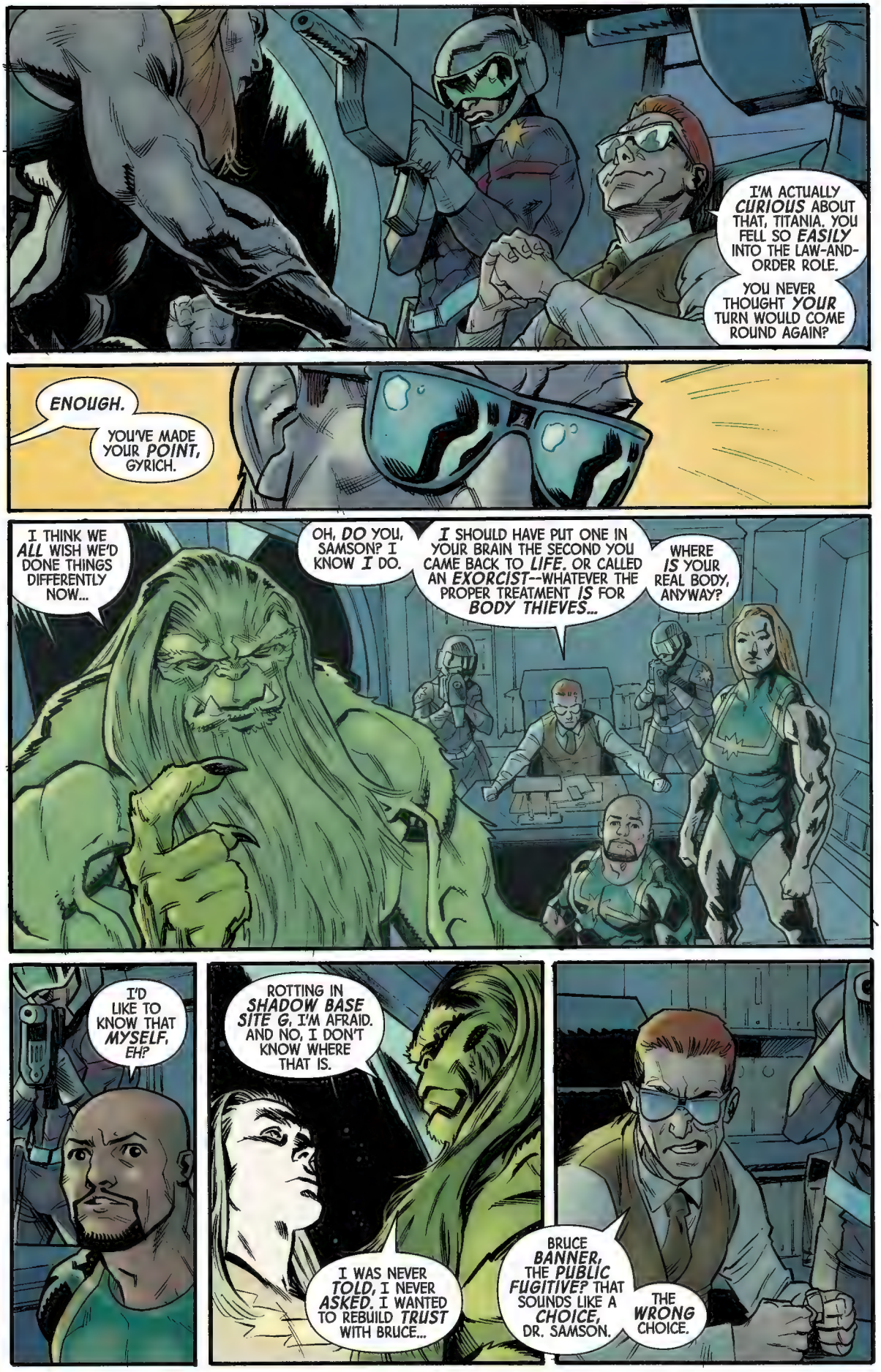
BELOW.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
WELL?
I ASKED YOU A QUESTION.
THE HULK. PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE. THE VERY CREATURE THE GAMMA FLIGHT TASK FORCE WAS CREATED TO HUNT AND CAPTURE.
AND HE ESCAPES FROM RIGHT UNDER YOUR NOSES.
AND HE WASN'T EVEN A HULK! HE WAS ARMED WITH A PAIR OF PANTS AND ONE OF OUR OWN GUNS!
HOW EXACTLY DOES THAT HAPPEN, MR. JUDD?
WELL... MR. GYRICH...
...SINCE YOU'RE THE NEW BOSS, I GUESS WE THOUGHT WE'D TAKE OUR CUE FROM YOU, EH?
HOW'S THE JAW?

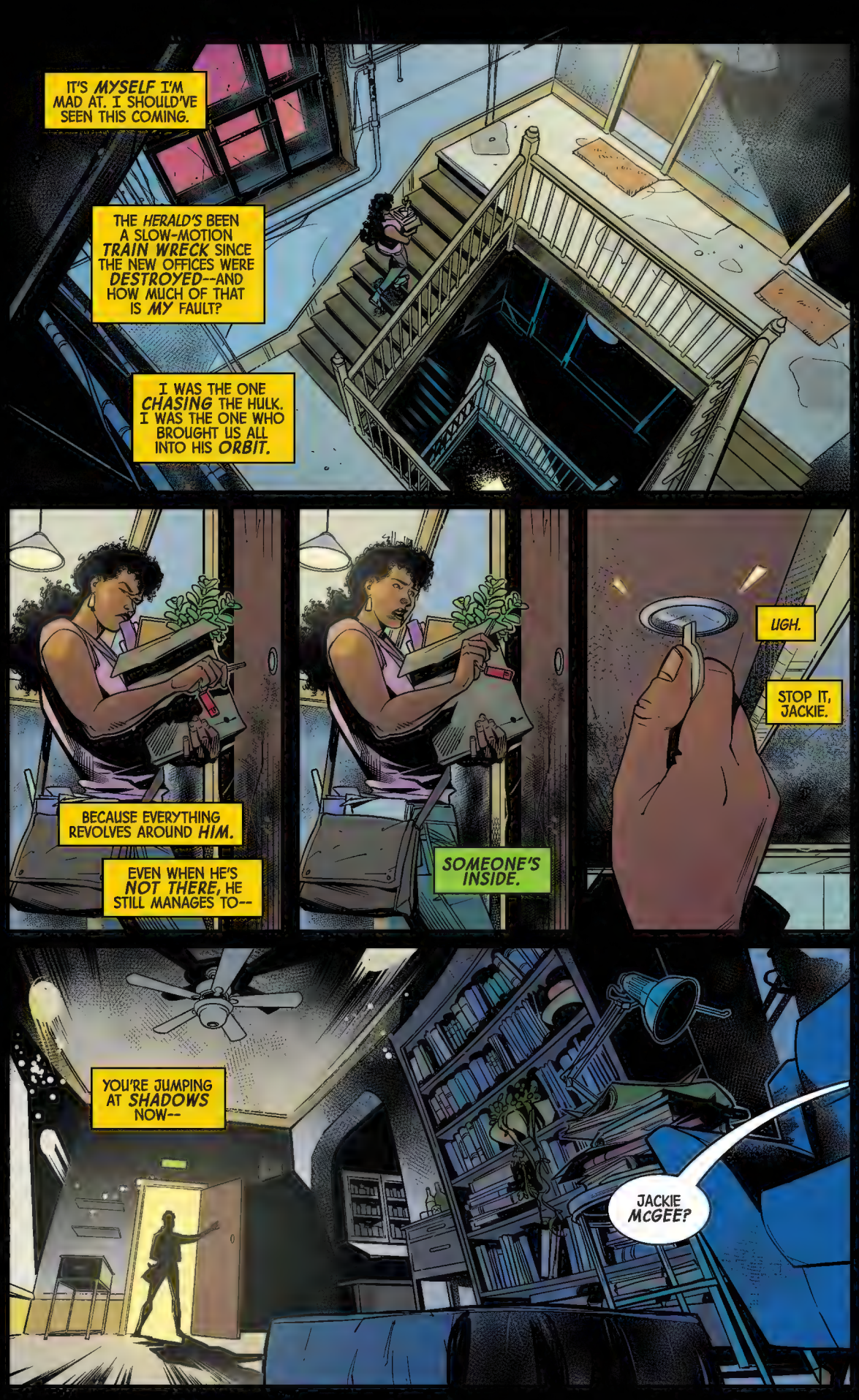
HEH.
GLAD YOU FIND THAT AMUSING, MS. MACPHERRAN.
WHERE'S YOUR HUSBAND, BY THE WAY? THE ABSORBING MAN?
CARL? HE SAYS HE AIN'T COMIN' BACK UNTIL YOU GET STRONGER WINDOWS ON THIS TUB--
I ASK BECAUSE I JUST SENT A TEXT TO A CERTAIN LEGAL TEAM IN OUR EMPLOY.
WITHIN THE HOUR, THERE WILL AGAIN BE A WARRANT OUT FOR CARL CREEL'S ARREST ACROSS ALL FIFTY STATES.
YOU-- YOU SON OF A--
EASY--
HE FOUGHT THE HULK FOR YOU! THE HULK!
HOW COULD YOU DO THAT?
I ALREADY TOLD YOU HOW, MS. MACPHERRAN.
I SENT A TEXT.

ARIZONA.
OUTSIDE PHOENIX.
SEE, THAT'S THE THING ABOUT ME, MS. McGEE. I LIKE TO DO THINGS FACE-TO-FACE. THE PERSONAL TOUCH... IT'S IMPORTANT.
THE ART OF CONVERSATION.
AND OBVIOUSLY, AS THE, AH...INTERIM EDITOR FOR THE ARIZONA HERALD...WELL, I'M HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH A LOT OF PEOPLE TODAY.
YEAH. A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE PACKING UP CARDBOARD BOXES.
THE ONES WHO EVEN HAD THE CHANCE TO UNPACK AFTER PHOENIX...
WELL--THERE YOU GO. THAT'S WHY YOU'RE THE REPORTER.
THAT EYE FOR DETAIL.
WHAT HAPPENED TO MURRAY?
EXTENDED LEAVE.
HIS HEALTH.
THAT BUSINESS WITH THE GIANT MONSTERS DID A NUMBER ON HIM. ON THE PAPER, TOO.
WHICH IS WHY THE BOARD SENT ME IN TO... WELL...
LET ME START BY SAYING I'M A HUGE FAN OF YOUR WORK.


WE VALUE YOU. WE VALUE YOUR PERSPECTIVE HERE.
THE WORK YOU DO...IT'S MORE THAN JOURNALISM. YOU GIVE A VOICE TO THE VOICELESS. IT'S INSPIRATIONAL, FRANKLY.
ESPECIALLY IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES.
I'M SURE YOUR FATHER WOULD BE VERY PROUD.
HOWEVER. THAT SAID.
THE BOARD FEELS THE HERALD WOULD BENEFIT FROM PIVOTING. LESS OF A PRINT PRESENCE...LESS EMPHASIS ON INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING...
...AND OBVIOUSLY, WE'D NEED TO ADJUST YOUR SALARY.
BUT LET'S THINK OF IT AS A FRESH START.
HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT LISTS?
FUN, RIGHT?
"DID YOU HONESTLY NEVER IMAGINE THIS DAY WOULD COME?"


I'M ACTUALLY CURIOUS ABOUT THAT, TITANIA. YOU FELL SO EASILY INTO THE LAW-AND-ORDER ROLE.
YOU NEVER THOUGHT YOUR TURN WOULD COME ROUND AGAIN?
ENOUGH.
YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT, GYRICH.
I THINK WE ALL WISH WE'D DONE THINGS DIFFERENTLY NOW...
OH, DO YOU, SAMSON? I KNOW I DO.
I SHOULD HAVE PUT ONE IN YOUR BRAIN THE SECOND YOU CAME BACK TO LIFE. OR CALLED AN EXORCIST--WHATEVER THE PROPER TREATMENT IS FOR BODY THIEVES...
WHERE IS YOUR REAL BODY, ANYWAY?
I'D LIKE TO KNOW THAT MYSELF, EH?
ROTTING IN SHADOW BASE SITE G, I'M AFRAID. AND NO, I DON'T KNOW WHERE THAT IS.
I WAS NEVER TOLD, I NEVER ASKED. I WANTED TO REBUILD TRUST WITH BRUCE...
BRUCE BANNER, THE PUBLIC FUGITIVE? THAT SOUNDS LIKE A CHOICE, DR. SAMSON.
THE WRONG CHOICE.

MAYBE I SHOULD KEEP *YOU* IN THE HULK'S OLD CELL, HM?
DRAIN THE GAMMA OUT OF *YOU!*
MAYBE TAKE YOUR *PELT!*
MAKE A *RUG* OUT OF IT!
PRETTY SURE YOUR MEMORY'LL *COME BACK* AFTER WE--
SSSKKRRRRRRKK
SHOOT HIM.
NOW.
I--I DON'T THINK THAT'S *WISE,* SIR.
HE'S STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE--
SKRRKK SKRKK
SKRIK SKRIKK


IT'S MYSELF I'M MAD AT. I SHOULD'VE SEEN THIS COMING.
THE HERALD'S BEEN A SLOW-MOTION TRAIN WRECK SINCE THE NEW OFFICES WERE DESTROYED--AND HOW MUCH OF THAT IS MY FAULT?
I WAS THE ONE CHASING THE HULK. I WAS THE ONE WHO BROUGHT US ALL INTO HIS ORBIT.
BECAUSE EVERYTHING REVOLVES AROUND HIM.
EVEN WHEN HE'S NOT THERE, HE STILL MANAGES TO--
SOMEONE'S INSIDE.
UGH.
STOP IT, JACKIE.
YOU'RE JUMPING AT SHADOWS NOW--
JACKIE McGEE?

SHADOW
CRNNCH
BASE
SHADOW BASE
IT'S FORTEAN IT'S SHADOW BASE IT'S
McGOWAN...?
DON'T SHOOT!
I DIDN'T BREAK IN! I--I TRANSLOCATED HERE!
IT'S RISKY, BUT IF YOU USE A PARTICLE SPREAD TO MAP THE LOCATION PRE-JUMP, THE CHANCE OF MATERIALIZING INSIDE SOMETHING IS--
FORGET THAT! WHY ARE YOU HERE?
DID--DID FORTEAN SEND YOU?
HE'S DEAD. YOU WERE THERE.
I--I'VE BEEN TRYING TO FIND PEOPLE. PEOPLE I THINK COULD HELP.
I'VE...I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR GAMMA MUTATES.
LIKE YOU.

IT'S A BLUFF. INTIMIDATION TACTICS. IT'S BASIC.
IT'S PATHETIC!
YOU MIGHT SURVIVE GETTING BLOWN OUT INTO SPACE, MONSTER-- BANNER DID--
BUT THE SAME ISN'T TRUE FOR YOUR--
SKREEEEK
THAT'S THE THING, GYRICH. I'VE BEEN DEAD-- AND DEATH IS FINE.
IT'S THE BEING ALIVE AGAIN AFTERWARD. THE SURVIVING.
ALL THAT SURVIVING.
FROM MY PERSPECTIVE?
TAP TAP
I'D BE DOING YOU ALL A FAVOR.
...
LET THEM GO.

PFFT.
WIMPS.
AH...IS THIS PAID LEAVE, MR. GYRICH? ARE WE ON FURLOUGH?
LAUGH IT UP WHILE YOU CAN, HILLBILLY.
AND BE GLAD I HAVE HIGHER PRIORITIES.
YOUR TURN WILL COME.
CALL THE BACKUP TEAM.
I'LL ADDRESS THEM PERSONALLY.
I GOTTA ADMIT, SAMSON--I NEVER LIKED YOU MUCH.
BUT THAT WAS A HELL OF A BLUFF...
IT WAS.
I WAS NEARLY CONVINCED MYSELF, EH?
YEAH.
ME TOO.

ALPHA FLIGHT GOT A LITTLE RAMSHACKLE AFTER CAROL DANVERS LEFT. THE MEMBER NATIONS STARTED PULLING THEIR FUNDING.
SO I CAN PIGGYBACK THEIR SATELLITE FEEDS AND CHECK THE DATA THEY DON'T BOTHER TO. LIKE A WEAK SIGNAL IN ARIZONA.
WHAT I'M HOLDING IS A BASIC GAMMA READER. I CARRY IT BECAUSE I'M WORRIED ABOUT MY OWN EXPOSURE--BUT I DON'T PING THE RADAR.
YOU DO.
SINCE GEORGEVILLE, I THINK.
NO. THAT'S--IT'S NOT POSSIBLE.
I WAS ANGRY TODAY. I WAS TERRIFIED JUST NOW. NOTHING HAPPENED--I DIDN'T HULK OUT, OR--
THAT'S NOT ALWAYS HOW IT WORKS--
SO HOW DOES IT WORK? WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME?
I NEED TO KNOW!
I NEED TO--
--TO KNOW.
JACKIE?

WHAT IS IT?
WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT?
"WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?"

WHAT AM I LOOKING AT HERE?
WELL, BRUCE? ANY IDEAS?
FATHER...?
CONCENTRATE!
PART OF YOU IS HERE WITH ME. YOUR OTHER PARTS--YOUR ALTERS--ARE ABOVE, IN THE WORLD.
GAMMA SHOULD BE FLOWING BETWEEN YOU. FROM HERE TO THERE, FROM THERE TO HERE. A FEEDBACK LOOP, EVER INCREASING.
A BEAUTIFUL SPIRE OF GAMMA, UP TO THE SKY...
...DOWN TO THE LOWEST POINT.
TO THE ONE BELOW ALL.

YOU KNOW WHAT'S *REALLY* GALLING? *BRIAN* MADE IT WORK. AND I'VE DONE A *MUCH* BETTER JOB ON YOU.
LOOK WHAT I'VE *WROUGHT* FROM YOU, BRUCE... FROM YOUR *TWISTED SOUL*...
MOTHER?
MOTHER, PLEASE LOOK AT ME.
BUT SOMETHING'S NOT *THERE*. SOME VITAL *CONNECTION* IN THE CIRCUIT.
I *DEVOURED* BRIAN. I *BECAME* HIM. SO SOMEWHERE, THE ANSWER IS IN *ME*.
WHAT AM I *MISSING*, DR. BANNER...?
*IT BURROWS IN.*
*WEARS OUR SOULS.*
*LIKE MASKS ON A STAGE.*
*EH?* IF YOU'RE GOING TO SHOW UP, BRIAN, MAKE *SENSE--*
WAIT.
*WHAT* DID YOU SAY...?

A HOST PERSONALITY...

I TRIED TO WARN YOU.

THE...THE *BROKEN LINK.* IT ISN'T BETWEEN HERE AND THE LIVING WORLD, OR BETWEEN BRUCE AND HIS ALTERS... IT'S...

IT'S BETWEEN *ME...*

...AND *THAT.*

YOU DEVOURED ME. YOU BECAME ME. BUT YOU WEREN'T THE FIRST.

NO...!

YOU SAID IT YOURSELF...OR WAIT, WAS THAT ME? I AM MYSELF...

...BUT I AM ALSO HIM.

BRIAN, STOP! STOP THIS!

BRUCE, HELP ME--

THIS. REALLY ISN'T.

THE BEST TIME.

NO! *PLEASE!*

NO!

YES.
YES, OF COURSE.
I WAS SO BLIND... BUT NOW...
NOW I SEE.

SO, YOU SEE THE SITUATION, GENTLEMEN AND LADY.
THE HULK IS THE MOST DANGEROUS GAMMA CREATURE TO EXIST--AND GAMMA FLIGHT JUST WALKED OUT ON THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO CATCH HIM.
BUT WHO NEEDS THEM? AM I RIGHT, DR. UTRECHT?
NOT US, COMMANDER GYRICH. NOT FOR WHAT YOU'RE PAYING.
AND THIS AMNESTY YOU MENTIONED...THAT'S PERMANENT, I TAKE IT?
YOU CAN TRUST ME, UTRECHT. I'M ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS.
I GOT A QUESTION. HOW FAR CAN WE GO ON THIS?
SAY SOME CIVILIAN'S IN THE WAY. SOME HULK HUGGER.
WHAT ARE THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT HERE?
YOU WANT A SET OF RULES? FROM ME?
MR. STEEL... HOW SHOULD I PUT THIS...

# A GAME OF CONSEQUENCES

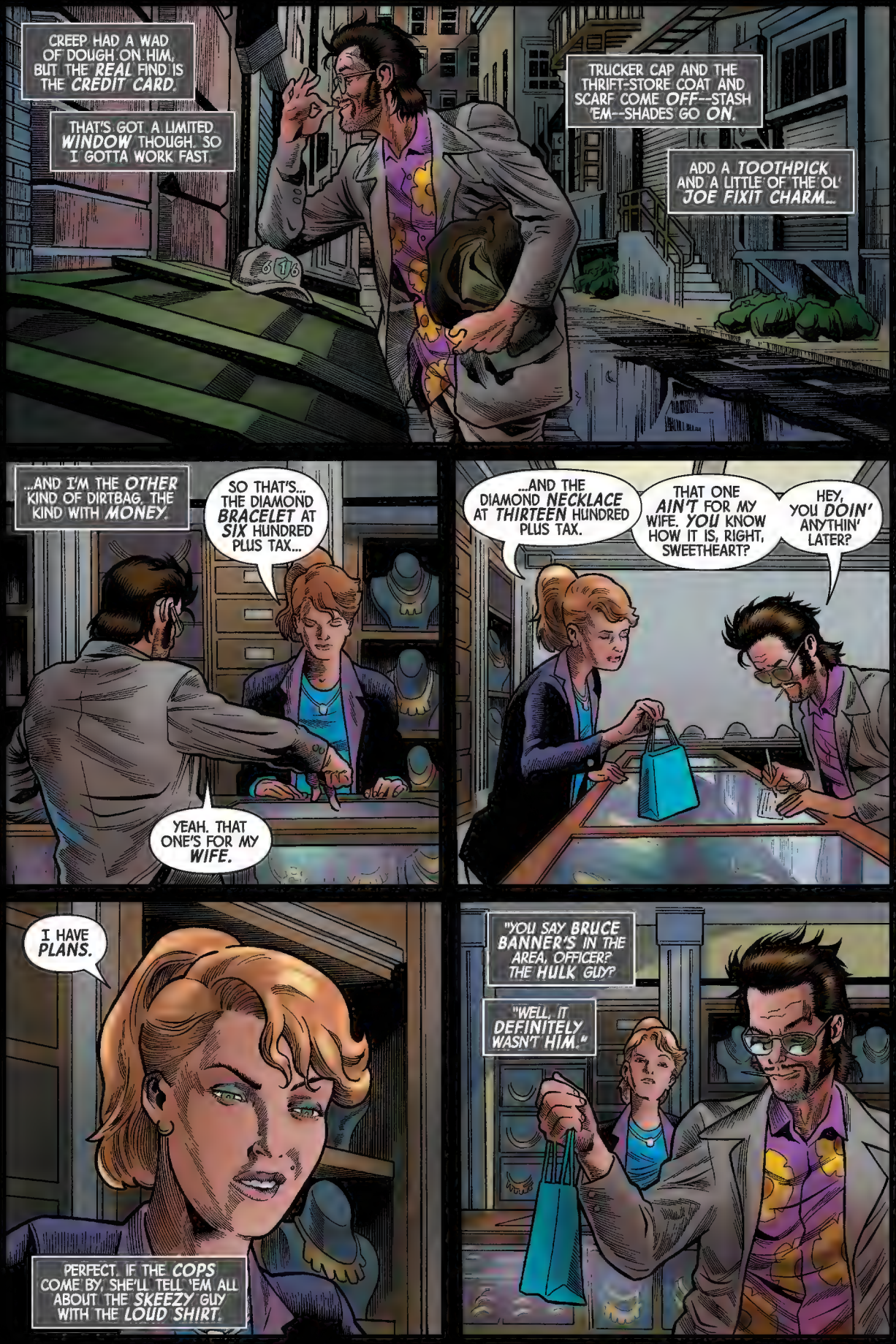
43

**"IT IS POSSIBLE THAT TO BE A GOOD MAN IS NOT THE SAME AS TO BE A GOOD CITIZEN."**

— ARISTOTLE,
*THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS*

NEW YORK CITY.
SO HERE'S THE SKINNY, STARTING AT THE TOP.
STARLIN'S
I AIN'T BRUCE BANNER.
BANNER'S GONE. THE LEADER TOOK HIM TO HELL--KILLED THE DEVIL HULK TOO.
SO RIGHT NOW, IT'S ME AND THE DUMB HULK. AND WE AIN'T EXACTLY OUR USUAL SELVES.
SEE, STERNS TOOK MOST OF THE GAMMA WHEN HE TOOK BANNER.
NOW THE BIG GUY LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE LET THE AIR OUT OF HIM. THE WEAKEST ONE THERE IS...
...EXCEPT FOR ME.
I USED TO BE THE GREY HULK. NOW--DON'T ASK ME WHY--I'M STUCK IN BANNER'S BODY.
ONE MORE PUNY HUMAN, JUST TRYING TO STAY ALIVE...
...BUT THEN, I'M REAL GOOD AT STAYING ALIVE.

AFTER BANNER GOT SHOT STEALING CLOTHES ONCE TOO OFTEN, DADDY DEVIL PUT ME IN CHARGE OF FINDING MONEY.
HERE'S HOW I DO IT.
BANNER'S GOT ONE OF THOSE FACES. NONDESCRIPT. ESPECIALLY ONCE YOU GROW A MOUSTACHE ON IT.
YOU SEE ME, WHAT DO YOU SEE?
JUST ANOTHER GUY WITH ONE OF THOSE FACES.
--I MEAN, AM I SUPPOSED TO CARE ABOUT ALL HER LITTLE HEALTH PROBLEMS?
I CARE ABOUT GOOD TENANTS, OKAY? TENANTS WHO CAN KEEP UP WITH THE RENTS I SET.
HERE'S A TRICK I LEARNED OFF MIKE BERENGETTI. DIDN'T HAVE THE FINGERS FOR IT THEN THOUGH.
IF THAT'S NOT HER? SHE NEEDS TO PACK UP AND--HEY! WATCH IT, DIRTBAG!
-MUMBLE-
THAT'S ME.
ANOTHER DIRTBAG WITH ONE OF THOSE FACES...
...AND YOUR WALLET.


CREEP HAD A WAD OF DOUGH ON HIM, BUT THE REAL FIND IS THE CREDIT CARD.
THAT'S GOT A LIMITED WINDOW THOUGH. SO I GOTTA WORK FAST.
TRUCKER CAP AND THE THRIFT-STORE COAT AND SCARF COME OFF--STASH 'EM--SHADES GO ON.
ADD A TOOTHPICK AND A LITTLE OF THE OL' JOE FIXIT CHARM...
...AND I'M THE OTHER KIND OF DIRTBAG. THE KIND WITH MONEY.
SO THAT'S... THE DIAMOND BRACELET AT SIX HUNDRED PLUS TAX...
YEAH. THAT ONE'S FOR MY WIFE.
...AND THE DIAMOND NECKLACE AT THIRTEEN HUNDRED PLUS TAX.
THAT ONE AIN'T FOR MY WIFE. YOU KNOW HOW IT IS, RIGHT, SWEETHEART?
HEY, YOU DOIN' ANYTHIN' LATER?
I HAVE PLANS.
PERFECT. IF THE COPS COME BY, SHE'LL TELL 'EM ALL ABOUT THE SKEEZY GUY WITH THE LOUD SHIRT.
"YOU SAY BRUCE BANNER'S IN THE AREA, OFFICER? THE HULK GUY?
"WELL, IT DEFINITELY WASN'T HIM."

AFTER THAT, I JUST NEED TO FIND A PAWNSHOP. THE RIGHT PAWNSHOP.
THESE AIN'T BAD PIECES-- I CAN MOVE 'EM, AT LEAST. SAME-DAY RECEIPTS THOUGH...
CALL IT FOUR HUNDRED FOR BOTH.
A GRAND.
SIX AND A HALF.
JAZZ
YOU GOT I.D. ON YOU, I'LL GO HIGHER...
YEAH, YEAH. MAKE IT TWENTIES AND A TEN.
AFTER THIS, I DON'T WANNA SEE YOU FOR A WHILE, OKAY?
SURE.
AND I'LL STILL NEED A NAME, JUST FOR THE BOOKS...
MR. GREY.
YEAH? AS IN CHRISTIAN?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
AND THAT'S WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM.

THAT AND A DOZEN SCAMS LIKE IT. BANNER NEVER KNEW--HE DIDN'T LET HIMSELF.
AND HE KNEW BETTER THAN TO ASK.
LET'S FACE IT--HE'D HAVE HATED IT.
A RICH GUY HAVIN' TO CALL HIS CREDIT CARD COMPANY? A BANK INCONVENIENCED? HEAVEN FORFEND.
WHAT WOULD THE AVENGERS THINK? WHAT WOULD SPIDER-MAN SAY?
THAT'S WHAT SEPARATES HIM AND ME. IT'S NOT HIS BIG BRAIN, OR THAT I CAN THROW A PUNCH.
IT'S THAT HE ALWAYS WANTED THE HUMANS TO LIKE HIM.
EVEN WITH THE WHOLE "END THE WORLD" THING--HE ALWAYS WANTED THEIR APPROVAL.
I ALWAYS KNEW HOW FAST THEY COULD TAKE THAT AWAY.
BRUCE WANTED TO BE THE GOOD GUY.
++ INITIATING ATTACK PROGRAM ++ SMASH...001 ++
YEAH?

I AIN'T NO GOOD GUY.

ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.

SMASH THIS.

KLANK

NICELY DONE, IRONCLAD.

YOU SEE ME BOOST MY *MASS* THERE? GAVE IT THAT LITTLE BIT *EXTRA.*

*YOUR* TURN, SIMON. HEY, DO THAT COOL TRICK WITH YOUR *REPELLING FIELD...*

WHICH *ONE,* MICHAEL?

THE ONE WHERE I APPLY A FEW *THOUSAND* NEWTONS OF FORCE TO A FEW *SQUARE INCHES--*

--AND CORE A *TWO-TON ROBOT* LIKE AN *APPLE?*

NOT *BAD,* VECTOR. BUT NOT ALWAYS *ENOUGH--* FOR THE *HULK.*

*X-RAY--* YOU'RE UP.

EH, MIKE AND SI GOT THE HARD PART DONE ALREADY.
I MEAN, I CAN SHOOT RADIATION AT THE HULK...BUT IT'S NEVER DONE THAT MUCH.
SHOW HIM THE GAMMA-NEGATIVE RAYS, JIMMY.
THEY'RE A RIOT.
RIGHT, RIGHT. THIS IS JUST COSMIC RAYS BY ANOTHER NAME--THE SAME KIND THAT MADE US U-FOES WHAT WE ARE.
THEY ALWAYS HAD THIS WEIRD EFFECT ON THE HULK, LIKE HE WAS ALLERGIC OR SOMETHING. KINDA HARD TO SHOW ON A TRAINING ROBOT...
...BUT YOU GET THE IDEA.
SEEMS MORE THAN ADEQUATE TO ME. VAPOR--YOUR TURN.
WE'RE ALL OUT OF ROBOT--BUT SHOW US HOW YOU HANDLE THE OTHER VITAL PART OF A HULK OPERATION...
...QUELLING DISSENT.
NONLETHAL, PLEASE. THESE ARE VOLUNTEERS.

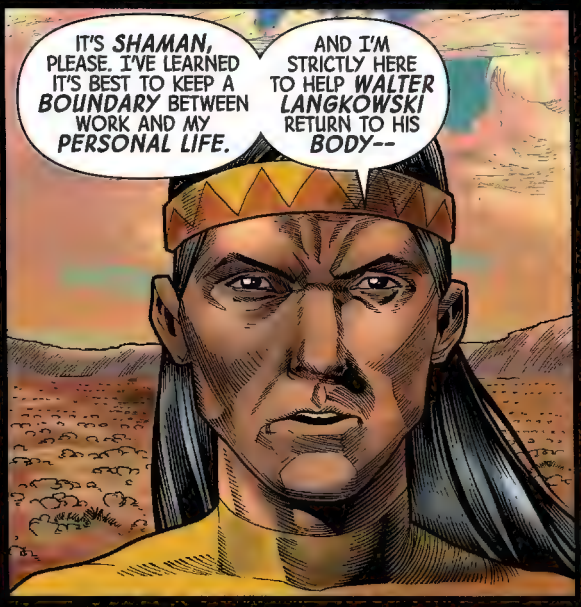
YOU GUYS ARE PLAYING HULK SUPPORTERS, HUH? FUN!
WELL, I HOPE YOU APPRECIATE THE EFFORT I'M PUTTING IN HERE--
--BECOMING TEAR GAS ISN'T EASY.
SATISFIED YET, GYRICH?
WHEN DO WE GRADUATE TO THE REAL HULK?
IN GOOD TIME, DR. UTRECHT. BANNER'S GAMMA SIGNATURE CHANGES WHEN HE'S "JOE FIXIT"--
--IT MAKES HIM HARDER TO TRACK. BUT THE HULK IS ANOTHER MATTER.
WE TOOK NEW READINGS WHILE HE WAS CAPTIVE. HIM, WE CAN FIND.
GAMMA SEARCH:
NEGATIVE
SO WHEN HE CHANGES... HE'S OURS.

"NO MATTER WHERE HE'S BEEN HIDING..."
LOS DIABLOS, NEW MEXICO.
THE ORIGINAL GAMMA BOMB TEST SITE?
ALSO KNOWN AS SHADOW BASE SITE G. THE LAST SHADOW BASE SITE STILL OPERATING-- AT LEAST UNTIL RECENTLY.
BRUCE AND CHARLENE AND THE REST OF US SET UP SHOP HERE AFTER THE BATTLE WITH FORTEAN...
IT MAKES SENSE, I SUPPOSE. IT'S DESERTED NOW-- AND SHADOW BASE DEFINITELY HAD A PRESENCE IN THESE PARTS.
AND SINCE I WAS HERE LAST, IT'S CLEAN. NO GAMMA TO BE FOUND-- AT LEAST ON THE SURFACE.
WHERE BETTER TO HIDE THAN IN THE LAST PLACE WE'D EVER LOOK?

THOUGH YOU COULD'VE MENTIONED IT *EARLIER*, SAMSON.
"I WAS NEVER TOLD"?
WHAT, I SHOULD HAVE TOLD GYRICH THE *TRUTH*?

FAIR. HE'D HAVE NUKED IT FROM *ORBIT*--HE STILL *MIGHT*, IF HE CATCHES US.
MAYBE MARY AND CARL WERE RIGHT TO SIT THIS *OUT*, EH?

ALL THE MORE REASON TO START *WORKING*. UNLIKE YOU TWO, I HAVE A *LIFE* TO GET BACK TO...
OF COURSE. THANKS FOR *JOINING* US, DR. TWOYOUNGMEN.


IT'S *SHAMAN*, PLEASE. I'VE LEARNED IT'S BEST TO KEEP A *BOUNDARY* BETWEEN WORK AND MY *PERSONAL LIFE*.
AND I'M STRICTLY HERE TO HELP *WALTER LANGKOWSKI* RETURN TO HIS *BODY*--

--WHICH MEANS RETURNING *YOU* TO *YOURS*. WHERE *IS* IT?
ABOUT A HUNDRED FEET *BELOW* US--SEALED UNDER *SOLID ROCK* AND A COUPLE OF STEEL *BLAST DOORS*. SORRY.

WELL, *THAT'S* A NICE LITTLE COMPLICATION.
I COULD MAYBE TAKE US TO THE BODY THROUGH A *PORTAL*--
--OR MAYBE *NOT*, EH?

MAYBE THE BODY'S COMING TO *US.*

RUMMMMMBLE

THAT'S... A BAD SIGN...

IS IT *REALLY.*

ANY *OTHER* COMPLICATIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE FAILED TO TELL US ABOUT, SAMSON?

HOLY...

*I'M.*

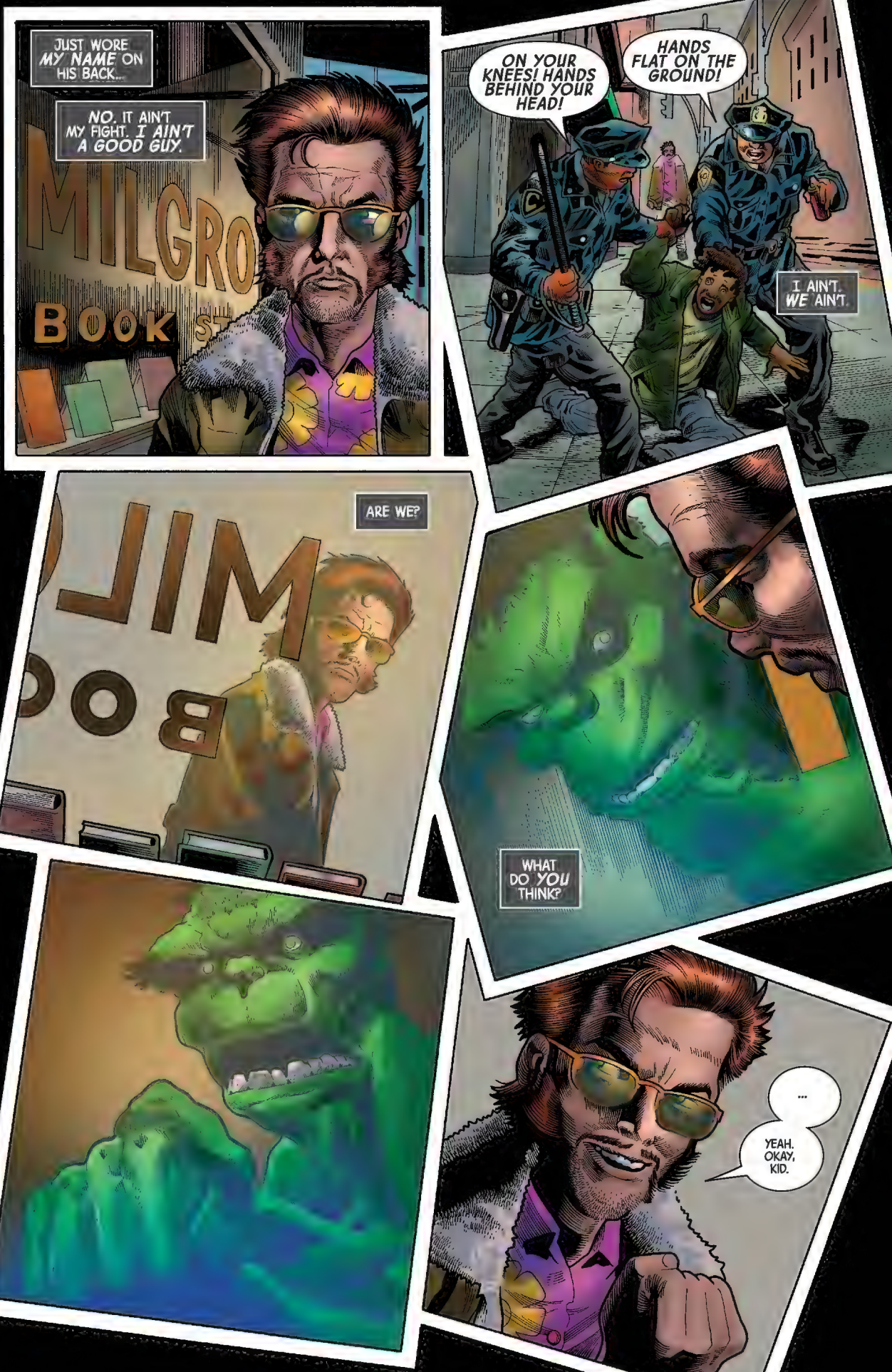
*FREE...*

...

SHOULD I TAKE THAT AS A *YES?*

THIS AIN'T THAT COMPLICATED.
THEY'RE LOOKIN' FOR ME--IF THEY AIN'T FOUND ME YET, IT'S ONLY 'CAUSE I AIN'T MAKIN' NOISE.
I AIN'T LETTIN' THE BIG GREEN GUY OUT-- NOT OUT WHERE SOME SATELLITE CAN PICK HIM UP, ANYHOW.
HE GRUMBLES, BUT I THINK HE GETS IT. WITHOUT BANNER-- HELL, I'LL JUST SAY IT.
NYPD
WE'RE TIRED. NOTHING LEFT IN THE TANK.
AND BANNER WAS THE ONE WHO WANTED TO SAVE THE WORLD.
I AIN'T GOT IT IN ME.
I JUST WANNA LIVE-- THE BEST I CAN, AS LONG AS I CAN. I AIN'T NO GOOD GUY.
I AIN'T NO--
HEY, YOU!
NYPD

HULK GUY!
OH CRAP.
SO MUCH FOR "ONE OF THOSE FACES."
SOMEONE RECOGNIZED BANNER--I PLAYED IT TOO CUTE IN THE JEWELRY STORE, OR--
YEAH! YOU IN THE HOODIE!
HUH?
WAIT, IT'S ONE OF THOSE KIDS--THAT "TEEN BRIGADE" OR WHATEVER.
THEY STILL DOIN' THAT? IS THAT HOME-MADE, OR--
HULK SMASH
I SAID STOP!
YOU TRYING TO RUN? GUILTY PEOPLE RUN!
MOVE ASIDE, BUDDY!
C'MERE!
I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING--
I GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE.
OWW--
SHUT UP!
SICK OF YOUR DAMN DISRESPECT--ALL OF YOU--
I GOTTA GO. THIS AIN'T MY FIGHT.
HE DIDN'T DO NOTHIN'...


JUST WORE MY NAME ON HIS BACK.
NO. IT AIN'T MY FIGHT. I AIN'T A GOOD GUY.
MILGRO
BOOK ST
ON YOUR KNEES! HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD!
HANDS FLAT ON THE GROUND!
I AIN'T. WE AIN'T.
ARE WE?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
...
YEAH. OKAY, KID.

OKAY.
STOP RESISTING!
C'MON, PLEASE-- I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING--
JUST PEPPER SPRAY HIS WORTHLESS--
PUNY.
PUNY HUMANS.
LEAVE.
HULK'S FRIEND.
ALONE!

OR HULK WILL SMASH!

HOLY--

WE NEED *BACKUP* HERE!

IT'S *HIM!*

IT'S THE HULK!

POLICE

PUNY HUMANS *FEAR* HULK! *RUN FROM HULK*-- EVEN NOW!

HULK NOT *NEED* BANNER! HULK IS *STILL*--

--STRONGEST THERE IS--

*AAARRGHH!*

OH, HULK.

I'M *SORRY...*

WE'RE THE **GOOD GUYS**

ORCHIS COMIX
$4
39
NOV
THE ASTOUNDING AU-FOES
ASSAULT ON THE HULK!

“I WAS AT EASE, BUT HE HATH BROKEN ME ASUNDER: HE HATH ALSO TAKEN ME BY MY NECK, AND SHAKEN ME TO PIECES, AND SET ME UP FOR HIS MARK.”

– JOB 16:12

WHO AM I?
MY NAME IS HENRY PETER GYRICH.
I'M THE GOVERNMENT, MISTER.
ACTING COMMANDER OF ALPHA FLIGHT, IF YOU WANT THE CURRENT TITLE-- THE LATEST OF MANY SUCH JOBS I'VE HELD. ALL ESSENTIALLY THE SAME.
WHEN INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS PLACE THEMSELVES OUTSIDE THE ESTABLISHED ORDER-- WHETHER IT'S THE HULK, THE AVENGERS OR LITTLE GREEN MEN--
--THE BIG BOYS SEND ME IN.
AND I ESTABLISH THE RULES. I LAY DOWN THE LAW.
I GOVERN.
AND IF YOU'VE DECIDED YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN RULES?

I DISABUSE YOU OF THAT NOTION.

HOWEVER I SEE FIT.

THEY TOLD ME I WAS GONNA FIGHT THE HULK!

WHOKK

WHO'S THIS BAG OF BONES MEANT TO BE? HUH?

WHO ARE YOU?

HULK... IS HULK...

AND HULK...

...IS TIRED...

...OF BEING HIT!

WRRUNCH

THAT'S MIKE TAGGED OUT, RIGHT? IT'S MY TURN?
C'MON--IT WAS A SURPRISE IS ALL, X-RAY--
RULES ARE RULES, IRONCLAD. YOU GOT TAGGED--YOUR TURN'S OVER.
WE ALL GET A PIECE.
SO IT'S MY TURN NOW, RIGHT?
IT WAS, JIMMY--BUT THEN YOU WASTED TIME ASKING--
--AND YOU LOST YOUR SPOT!
AW, SIS...
THIS IS WILD, MAN.
YOU GETTIN' THIS FOR POSTERITY OR WHAT?
I GOTTA DO SOMETHIN'... IT AIN'T RIGHT, Y'KNOW?
FOUR AGAINST ONE.
IT AIN'T RIGHT.
HHKKH--HRRCH--

OKAY--NOW IT'S GOT TO BE MY--
OH, NO. MOVE ASIDE, JAMES.
I'M THE LEADER HERE--
--AND I'VE ALREADY WAITED TOO LONG FOR THIS!
FOR MY POWER OF DIRECTIONAL FORCE TO STRIP EVERY LAST SCRAP OF FLESH FROM THE HULK--
--AND LEAVE HIS POLISHED SKULL FOR MY MANTEL!
RRAARGH!

YOU'VE SURVIVED THIS *BEFORE*, HULK-- AT THE *HEIGHT* OF YOUR POWERS.
BUT *NOW*-- WHAT CAN YOU *DO*?
WHAT CAN YOU *DO*, EXCEPT--
...LET GO.
AH.

KRUNCH
OW.
OKAY, THEN.
I GUESS WE'RE PICKING THIS UP IN NEW JERSEY.
IS IT MY TURN YET?
STRICT RULES ARE VITAL TO HUMANITY.

TAKE AWAY THE *RULES*...

LEN?

WHAT *IS* THAT?

...AND HUMANITY WILL SOON *FOLLOW.*

WELL...IT'S WHAT *KILLED* ME, PUCK.

AND IT LOOKS LIKE RICK JONES IS GROWING OUT OF ITS BACK NOW.

ANYTHING IN YOUR MAGIC BAG FOR *THIS*, SHAMAN?

NOT *YET.*

THE CREATURE SEEMS MORE *DEFENSIVE* THAN *AGGRESSIVE*...

*DEFENSIVE?* I *TOLD* YOU-- THIS THING *MURDERED ME!*

THAT'S THE *LEADER* IN THERE!

AND HE'S LAUGHING AT US!

LEAD...

ERR...

RROARRGH!
STOP.
STOP.
SAMSON-- NO!
HE'S NOT FIGHTING BACK!
IT'S THE SASQUATCH-- THE BEAST. SAMSON ISN'T USED TO ITS FURY...
YOU THINK? WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?
CATCH THE ATTENTION OF THE MAN INSIDE.
IT MAY BE AS SIMPLE AS... CONJURING...

...A DISTRACTION.
CHARLENE...?
OH MY GOD.
LEN? IS THAT YOU?
AND WAS THAT YOU, MICHAEL? PRETTY CONVENIENT TIMING...
SYNCHRONICITY IS A MAJOR COMPONENT OF MAGIC, OLD FRIEND.
SO IS TAKING THE CREDIT.

NOTHING MAGIC ABOUT IT... *SHAMAN*, RIGHT? FROM *ALPHA FLIGHT*?

I NOTICED A SERIOUS *GAMMA SPIKE* OUT HERE. FIGURED WE SHOULD TAKE A *LOOK*.

VIA *TRANSLOCATION*? LITTLE *DANGEROUS*, ISN'T IT?

I'M A *LOT* MORE CONFIDENT WITH THE *VARIABLES* THAN I WAS. OR MAYBE I'M JUST LESS *WORRIED* THESE DAYS.

IT'S A DANGEROUS *WORLD*, MR. JUDD.

ESPECIALLY WITH THE *LEADER* LIVING IN IT--

WAIT.

PUCK WAS *RIGHT*. HE *DIDN'T* FIGHT BACK.

STOP.

AND HE'S NOT *SMILING*...

*SO?* WHAT DOES *THAT* PROVE, McGEE?

THE LEADER *FAKED* BEING RICK FOR *WEEKS*--*MONTHS*--HE TOOK US *ALL* IN--

I KNOW. ME AS WELL. BUT IT'S LIKE...

...I CAN *SEE* HIM NOW.

OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE.

JACKIE?

WHAT *IS* IT?

AND IF YOU'RE NOT WILLING TO *SEE* HOW THE WORLD *REALLY WORKS*?

NEW JERSEY.
I HAVE NO PROBLEM TAKING YOU OUT OF IT. AND BELIEVE ME...
OKAY...WE'RE LOOKING FOR AN IMPACT CRATER...
HEY!
THERE HE IS!
H-HULK...
HULK WILL... SMASH...
NO, NO.
DON'T GET UP.
YOU'RE FINE RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE.

NO? NOT GOING TO SAVE YOURSELF THE PAIN? I MEAN, LOOK AT YOU.
WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING, HULK?
HULK SMASH.
HOW VERY ELOQUENT--
HEY. WAIT.
THIS AIN'T RIGHT, SIMON.
IT'S JIMMY'S TURN. YOU SAID EVERYBODY GETS A PIECE, REMEMBER?
C'MON, LET THE LITTLE GUY HAVE IT.
OF COURSE. THE GOOD GUYS SHOULD ALWAYS STICK TO THE RULES.
FORGIVE ME, JAMES.
YOU'RE UP.
HA!

I HAVE BEEN *WAITING* FOR THIS, MAN!

AND IF I'M *LAST TO BAT*--I'M HITTIN' IT *OUTTA THE PARK!*

FEEL *THAT?* PURE, CONCENTRATED *ANTI-GAMMA!*

*COSMIC RAYS*, HULK!

THEY'RE *CANDY* TO US! THEY'RE WHAT *GAVE US OUR POWERS!*

BUT FOR *YOU*--

--THEY'RE *PURE POISON!*

LIKE *GARLIC* FOR A *VAMPIRE*, AM I RIGHT? *LIKE HOLY WATER IN HELL!*

THEY'LL *BURN* YOU RIGHT BACK INTO A WEAK, PUNY *HUMAN*--

YOU-- SONS OF--

--AND *I AIN'T STOPPING THERE!*

SAVE SOME FOR THE REST OF US, KID--
NO, YOU WERE RIGHT-- WE'VE HAD OUR TURN. AND WE DON'T HAVE ALL NIGHT.
LET JAMES HAVE THE KILL...
THERE.
THAT'S THAT.
ANYONE ELSE FEEL LIKE GETTING BARBECUE?
...YOU WON'T LIKE WHERE YOU END UP.

BELOW.
...
WELL, THIS AIN'T GOOD.

WHAT'S THE WORD, KID?

BAD.
WE'RE IN BAD PLACE.

HULK NOT...
HULK NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO.

...
WELL, I'M GONNA SPIT IN HIS EYE.

# TO RULE IN HELL

45

"THE LOWEST EBB IS THE TURN OF THE TIDE."

– HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW,
"LOSS AND GAIN"

THE STATEN ISLAND FERRY.
THIS HAS GOTTA BE THE BEST PART OF MY DAY.
RIGHT HERE.
RIDIN' THE FERRY, TAKIN' IN THE AIR OFF THE RIVER--I'M TELLIN' YA, HONEY.
YOU SAY IT STINKS? I SAY THAT'S THE SMELL OF NEW YORK!
MM.
I MEAN, BENNY--Y'KNOW BENNY?--HE SAYS CENTRAL PARK. BUT C'MON.
HOT NUTS AND HORSE CRAP? NO COMPARISON! I'M TELLIN' YA!
G'WAN, SMELL THAT AIR...
SNFF
RR.
GAMMA.
WHAT'S THAT, HONEY?
ST. PETER DAVID
PREMIUM LAGER BEER
I SMELL GAMMA.

SO IT SMELLS A LITTLE GAMEY-- LOOKIT THAT VIEW!
DON'T GET THAT IN THE PARK--
SHRIPPP
WHAT THE HELL...?
AW, HONEY, NO!
IT--IT DON'T SMELL THAT BAD!
"TAKE A DEEP BREATH, FOLKS..."

NEW JERSEY.
...THAT'S THE SMELL OF VICTORY.
LET'S NOT GET AHEAD OF OURSELVES, MIKE.
VAPOR IS CORRECT, IRONCLAD. RUMOR HAS IT THAT DEATH AND THE HULK ARE NO LONGER ON SPEAKING TERMS.
IF HE SHOULD RETURN BEFORE WE HAVE HIM PROPERLY CONTAINED... WELL, LET'S JUST BE READY FOR ROUND TWO, HMM?
HA!
IF HE OPENS HIS EYES? I'LL JUST BURN THEM OUTTA HIS HEAD AGAIN. COSMIC RAYS, BABY--PAPER TO GAMMA'S ROCK.
HOPE YOU'RE HAPPY IN HELL, HULK...

"...'CAUSE YOU *AIN'T* COMING BACK!"

**BELOW.**

HULK NOT KNOW WHAT TO *DO*...

IT'S OKAY, KID. WE GOT THE *GREEN DOOR* ON OUR SIDE.

THAT'S OUR WAY *OUTTA HERE*--

BUT THE DOOR HAS *TWO* SIDES.

*SEE.*

*RED* DOOR...?

HULK... HULK *PUSH*, BUT...

...BUT DOOR IS *LOCKED.*

YOUR SOULS WILL BE *HOLLOWED.* YOU WILL BE NO DIFFERENT FROM THE *SHELLS* THAT ECHO HERE.

YOU WILL BE A *TRUE HULK*-- A WANDERING *CARCASS,* WREAKING *DESTRUCTION.* MAKING ME EVER *STRONGER.*

AS YOU HAVE SINCE THE MOMENT THE *ONE BELOW ALL* ENTERED MY FLESH AND OUR CIRCUIT WAS *COMPLETE.*

I WILL BE *YOUR LEADER*-- AND YOU WILL *FOLLOW.* AS MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL *SERVANT.*

AS YOU WERE *ALWAYS MEANT TO BE...*

...

OKAY.

WE GOT OUR WORK CUT OUT.

NEW MEXICO.
IT SEEMS WE HAVE OUR WORK CUT OUT FOR US, MS. McGEE.
I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT ALL THE PHANTASMAGORICAL FAUNA--THAT'S NORMAL, ESPECIALLY IN AN AREA WITH SO MUCH RESONANT HISTORY--
--BUT I'M SEEING TWO SOULS LOCKED IN THIS BODY. RICK JONES--AND A YOUNGER MAN I DON'T RECOGNIZE.
AND THEY'RE NOT USED TO THE SITUATION. THEY'RE IN CONFLICT.
THAT'S WHERE THE PROBLEM LIES...

SO...YOU'RE DONE, RIGHT?
THIS IS A LITTLE WEIRD...
MM? OH, YES. I'VE SEEN ENOUGH.
UH-HUH. WHAT EXACTLY HAVE YOU SEEN, SHAMAN? WHAT AM I SEEING?
YOU SAID "FAUNA"...
OF A KIND, YES. THERE ARE THINGS THAT EXIST OUTSIDE THE SPACE WE PERCEIVE WITH HUMAN EYES--IN THE WORLDS BEYOND.
SOME MAY BE EXPLAINED BY THE PARASCIENCES. ASTRAL PROJECTIONS, ENTITIES FORMED OF PSYCHIC TURBULENCE, VISITORS FROM OTHER PLANES...
MY GRANDFATHER HAD OTHER THEORIES, BUT I WAS YOUNG AND HEADSTRONG, AND MY RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM WAS STRAINED.
I REJECTED WHAT HE TRIED TO TEACH ME.
I DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE SPIRITS IN THIS WORLD, MS. MCGEE.
OF THE LIVING... AND OF THE DEAD.
GHOSTS.
YOU'RE SAYING I CAN SEE GHOSTS.

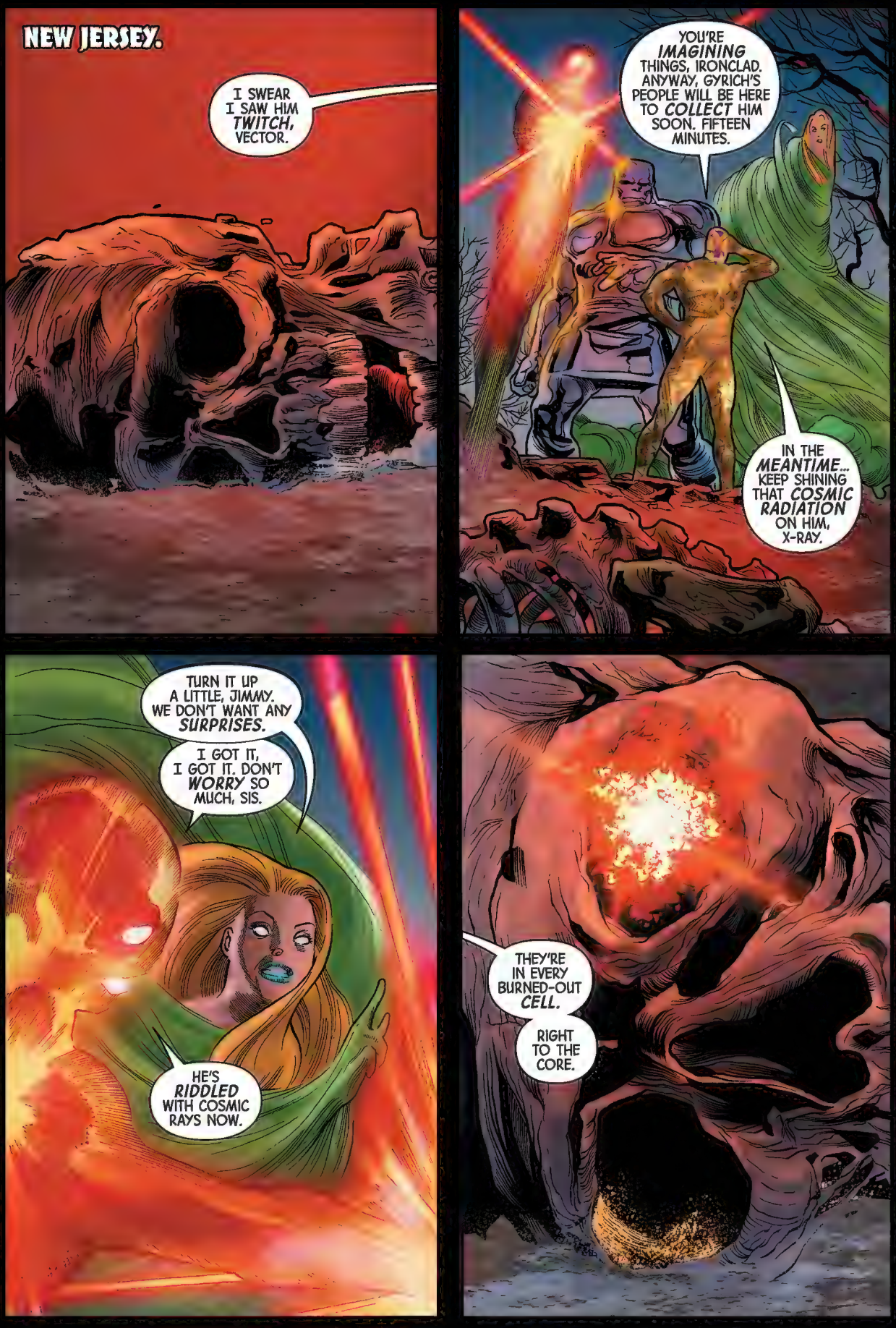
MAKES SENSE. SEEING GHOSTS AND ASTRAL FORMS IS A HULK POWER-- I'LL BET YOU CAN SNIFF OUT LIES TOO.
PRETTY USEFUL FOR A REPORTER, EH?
YEAH. GREAT.
I COULD TURN INTO A MONSTER AT ANY MOMENT, BUT AT LEAST I'M BETTER AT THE JOB I DON'T HAVE ANYMORE--
YOU DON'T KNOW THAT. THE MONSTER THING.
GAMMA ABILITIES MANIFEST IN ALL SORTS OF WAYS--
NO. IF I WAS GOING TO BE SHE-HULK, I'D BE SHE-HULK.
IF I WAS GETTING THE GOOD GAMMA, I'D HAVE THE GOOD GAMMA.
INSTEAD... ANY TIME I LOSE MY CONCENTRATION?
I SEE NIGHTMARES CRAWLING THROUGH THE SKIN OF THE WORLD.
IT'S THE BAD GAMMA, PUCK. IT'S THE HORROR SHOW.
AND WE DON'T KNOW HOW HORRIBLE IT'S GOING TO GET.
I CAN ALIGN THESE TWO--EASE THEIR SUFFERING. BUT...I CAN'T SEPARATE THEM.
EVEN MAKING THE ATTEMPT--
--THE RISK TO THE PATIENT IS TOO GREAT.
I ONLY HOPE SAMSON IS DOING BETTER WITH HIS ERRAND...

"...RETRIEVING HIS BODY."
HERE'S THE LAB. HOW'S THE RADIATION, CHARLENE?
IT'LL BE FINE IF I DON'T STAY TOO LONG.
I REALLY DON'T WANT TO TURN OUT LIKE...WELL...
ME?
I DON'T BLAME YOU. BEING THIS...THIS CREATURE...
...FRANKLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW WALTER LANGKOWSKI STOOD IT.
UM. ACTUALLY, I WAS THINKING OF JACKIE.
SOME OF THE THINGS SHE DESCRIBED SEEING... OOF.
OH. WELL, THAT'S FAIR TOO.
ALTHOUGH, SPEAKING OF SEEING THINGS...
CAN YOU, UH... SEE MY BODY ANYWHERE IN HERE...?
...
I'M GUESSING THIS IS WHERE IT WAS.
THAT'S NOT GOOD.

TWO MILES AWAY.
HEY.
GOING MY WAY?
I AM NOW.
YOU'RE LUCKY I STOPPED, THOUGH. I MEAN, HITCHHIKING IN THE DESERT?
I'M GUESSING YOU'VE HAD A BAD NIGHT...
HONESTLY? I'VE NEVER FELT THIS GOOD IN MY LIFE.
THE NAME'S WALTER.
WALTER SAMSON.
"WHO...?"

BELOW.
WHO'S TALKING...?
IS THAT YOU, HULK? I THOUGHT YOU WERE... WHAT ARE YOU SAYING...?
THE BELLY OF THE BEAST.
ABOUT JOE...?
YOU HAD A HUNCH... ABOUT JOE...?
YOU LEFT ROOM...?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

LEFT ROOM FOR WHAT...?


NEW JERSEY.
I SWEAR I SAW HIM TWITCH, VECTOR.
YOU'RE IMAGINING THINGS, IRONCLAD. ANYWAY, GYRICH'S PEOPLE WILL BE HERE TO COLLECT HIM SOON. FIFTEEN MINUTES.
IN THE MEANTIME... KEEP SHINING THAT COSMIC RADIATION ON HIM, X-RAY.
TURN IT UP A LITTLE, JIMMY. WE DON'T WANT ANY SURPRISES.
I GOT IT, I GOT IT. DON'T WORRY SO MUCH, SIS.
HE'S RIDDLED WITH COSMIC RAYS NOW.
THEY'RE IN EVERY BURNED-OUT CELL.
RIGHT TO THE CORE.

COME ON, THEN! I AIN'T SCARED OF YOU!

YOU KNOW WHO YOU'RE MESSIN' WITH?

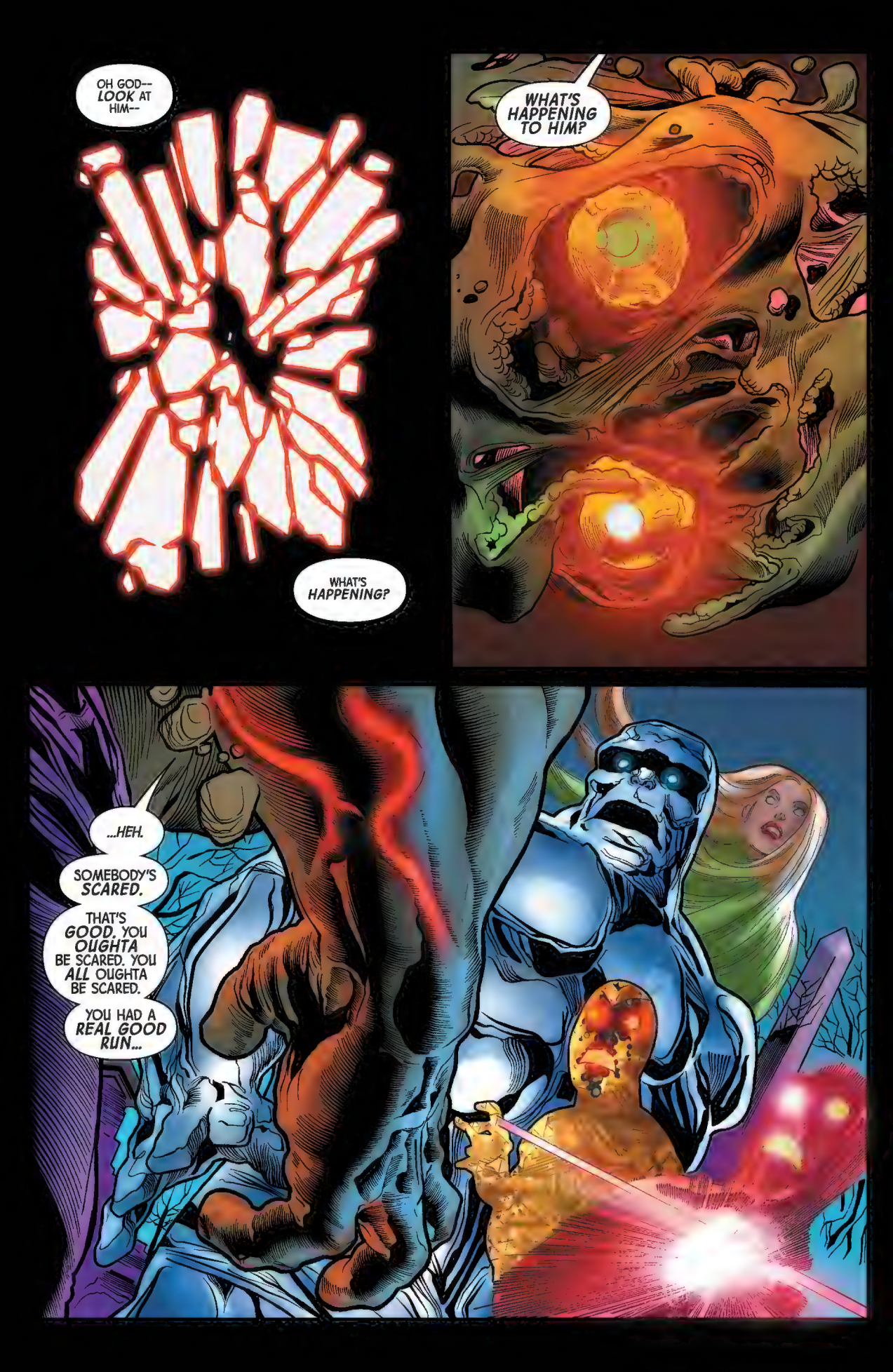
I'M THE HULK! YOU HEAR ME? THE HULK!

THE WORST HULK OF 'EM ALL!

I'M SUNSHINE JOE FIXIT--

—THE INCREDIBLE HULK!

NOW GET THE HELL OFF THE KID!
RED HULK...?
--WE'RE BLOWIN' THIS POPCORN STAND!
SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT.
STEP ASIDE, PAL--


OH GOD-- LOOK AT HIM--
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO HIM?
...HEH.
SOMEBODY'S SCARED.
THAT'S GOOD. YOU OUGHTA BE SCARED. YOU ALL OUGHTA BE SCARED.
YOU HAD A REAL GOOD RUN...

# READY OR NOT

46

“REVENGE IS FROM THE INDIVIDUAL, PUNISHMENT IS FROM GOD.”

— VICTOR HUGO,
*THE LAST DAY OF A CONDEMNED MAN*

SHADOW BASE SITE G.
SO NOW WHAT?
GOOD QUESTION, EH?
I HATE TO SAY IT, LEN, BUT YOUR BODY'S IN THE WIND.
WE JUST HAVE TO HOPE THE LEADER ISN'T WEARING IT--
NO. IT'S LANGKOWSKI.
HE RAN OFF WITH IT.
WALTER LANGKOWSKI? YOU KNOW THAT FOR SURE?
I ADMIT, I DON'T HAVE MORE THAN A HUNCH RIGHT NOW. BUT...IT FEELS RIGHT.
WE'RE IN QUASI-MAGICAL TERRITORY NOW, SAMSON. IMPORTANT DETAILS WILL COME TO US--HUNCHES INCLUDED.
I WONDER...
WHAT IS THAT, SHAMAN?
A RADIO, DR. McGOWAN. NOTHING MORE.

SURE IT IS.
ARE YOU STICKING AROUND, MIKE? WE DID GOOD HERE...
WE DID. JONES AND FRYE WERE IN PAIN FROM THE MERGING OF THEIR BODIES--WE'VE EASED THAT PAIN.
BUT...I HAVE A TEACHING POSITION AND A MEDICAL PRACTICE RIGHT NOW, PUCK. IN TWO DIFFERENT COUNTRIES...
...ONE MOMENT.
→KRRZTT←-- PITCHED BATTLE WITH LAW OFFICERS IN MANHATTAN.
IN A STATEMENT TO PRESS, ACTING ALPHA FLIGHT COMMANDER HENRY GYRICH STATED THAT THE HULK HAD BEEN SECURED BY THE FORMER U-FOES--
--THOUGH LOCAL RESIDENTS ARE NOW BEING WARNED TO EVACUATE THE AREA.
WE'LL BRING YOU FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AS WE-- →KZZT←
QUASI-MAGICAL TERRITORY.
IMPORTANT DETAILS WILL COME TO US.
BUT AS I SAID--I REALLY CAN'T GET INVOLVED PERSONALLY.
YOU'VE DONE PLENTY, MIKE. THANKS AGAIN.
...
HE'S GOING TO NEED HELP.
HELP THE HULK? IT'D CROSS A LINE-- FROM GYRICH'S BAD BOOKS TO THE MOST WANTED LIST.
LET'S THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE--
BRUCE.

HARD TO THINK...SEPARATE THOUGHTS. BUT...BRUCE...
I DON'T WHO'S
BRUCE. HE'S MY FRIEND.
HE SAVED ME.
SO I... I SAVE HIM. ALWAYS.
WE SAVE HIM.
PLEASE.
...WELCOME BACK, RICK.
OBVIOUSLY, I'M IN. IT'S WHY I WANTED YOU ALL TOGETHER IN THE FIRST PLACE.
SHALL WE VOTE?
ALL THOSE IN FAVOR?
JACKIE? YOU DON'T HAVE TO COME WITH US...
IT'S...
...WHERE THE STORY IS.
WHERE THE ANSWERS ARE.
THAT IT IS.
MOTION CARRIED. IF THE HULK NEEDS HELP...

"GAMMA FIGHT IS COMING TO THE RESCUE."

SO.

WHO'S UP FIRST?

NEW JERSEY.

RIGHT HERE!

'BOUT TIME I HAD A *REAL* FIGHT OUT OF--

--YOU--

DOWN *LOW*--

WHAPP

--TOO SLOW.

CRUNNKK

EEEAAAAHH!

MY--MY HAND--

SEE, THAT MAKES ME CURIOUS. ARE YA METAL ALL THE WAY THROUGH?
OR IS IT SQUISHY ORGANS IN A SMOOTH, SHINY SHELL?
LET'S FIND OUT...
NO!
NO!
VECTOR!
I--I--
HE'S KILLING MIKE! AND HE-- HE JUST ATE MY RADIATION--
NN- NUUHRRR--
HLLB
MUHH
SIMON!
DO SOMETHING!
I--I'VE GOT THIS--

I'VE GOT THIS--
VZAMM
VAPOR! TURN INTO--INTO ANESTHETIC OR SOMETHING--HELP IRONCLAD--
THE HELL WITH THAT.
ANNE...?
AAUU
YEAH, ANNE.
WHAT'S THE MATTER, YOU DON'T LIKE MIKE? WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?
MIKE CAN WAIT--WHILE I SEE WHAT YOUR FACE LOOKS LIKE AS IT MELTS!
SULFURIC ACID GAS, HULK--A GIFT FROM ME TO YOU--
YA SHOULDN'T HAVE.

HHUUUUP
HE--HE BREATHED HER IN--
HE--HE JUST--
THAT'S THE ATMOSPHERE ON VENUS, X-RAY. GIVE IT TIME--
GIVE IT--
HOOF!
EEAAAAHHH!
MY EYES!

OH GOD, SIMON--I'M BECOMING ALKALI, IT'LL NEUTRALIZE THE BURN--I'M SO SORRY--
NOT AS SORRY AS HE IS.
J-JUST--
FZAMMM
JUST GET AWAY! GET AWAY!
LEAVE US ALONE!
LEAVE US ALONE...
ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS ASK, SIMON.
AHH... VECTOR EXPRESS.
IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO TRAVEL.
"YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU HAD HIM-- IN YOUR HANDS--"

THE ALPHA FLIGHT SPACE STATION.
--AND YOU THREW HIM AWAY?
VECTOR BLASTED HIM AND HE WENT FLYING, GYRICH.
BACK TOWARD MANHATTAN, I THINK.
YOU SENT HIM BACK TO A POPULATED AREA? THE MIDDLE OF A CITY?
HE WAS WEAKENED, X-RAY--A SHADOW OF HIS FORMER SELF--
YEAH, WELL, UH... SOMETHING BULKED HIM UP AGAIN.
DON'T ASK ME WHAT.
NOT GOOD ENOUGH. YOU'RE WORKING FOR ME NOW--WHEN I GIVE YOU A TASK, I EXPECT YOU TO CARRY IT OUT.
TWICE?
WE HAD THE HULK. HE WAS DOWN--READY FOR COLLECTION AND CONTAINMENT.
IF YOUR PEOPLE HAD BEEN READY, VECTOR WOULDN'T BE BLIND AND IRONCLAD WOULDN'T BE MAIMED.
BUT YOU WEREN'T READY--AND NOW THE HULK IS LOOSE. AND THE BUCK STOPS WITH YOU, HENRY.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

...
SOMETHING I'M LIKELY TO REGRET.
FOR YOUR PART--REPORT TO PUBLIC RELATIONS. GET SOME PICTURES OF THE INJURIES.
WE CAN AT LEAST GET SOME SYMPATHETIC MEDIA COVERAGE OUT OF YOU...
GO TO HELL, GYRICH--
END TRANSMISSION.
STARK
TOO LATE, VAPOR. I'M ALREADY THERE.
BECAUSE YET AGAIN, I AM FORCED TO BOW, SCRAPE, PROSTRATE MYSELF AND OTHERWISE MAKE NICE...
...WITH THE DEVILS I KNOW.
I NEED A DRINK.

MANHATTAN.
WEIN'S
WEINS
BEER ME.
NYC TAXI
I'M IN A CHAMPAGNE MOOD, BUT IT'LL DO FOR A START.
GO AHEAD AND PUT IT ON MY TAB.
...
YOU'RE THE HULK.
HOW ABOUT THAT--THE TV DIDN'T LIE.
THERE'S A PLACE WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME.

AND THEY LOOK REAL GLAD I CAME.
NIGHTY NIGHT, FOLKS. DRIVE SAFE...
PLEASE. I--I DON'T WANT TROUBLE--
I AIN'T ABOUT TO WRECK THE PLACE, PAL. IF THE COPS SHOW, I'LL TAKE IT OUTSIDE.
OR LEAP TO PHILLY. GET A JOB AS A MASCOT.
C'MON, PALLY, I'M CELEBRATING HERE. I'M ME AGAIN.
SET 'EM UP.
I DON'T WANT TROUBLE.
YEAH. YOU MENTIONED.
GEEZ. YOU'RE TERRIFIED OF ME, AIN'CHA?
I FORGOT WHAT THAT WAS LIKE.
GLUK
...
DON'T FEEL AS GOOD AS IT USED TO.

THIS BEER AIN'T DOIN' IT EITHER. GET ME WHISKEY-- MAYBE A REAL DRINK'LL HELP ME WORK OUT MY NEXT MOVE...
I--I DON'T--
ENOUGH ALREADY. HAVE ONE YOURSELF, YOU MIGHT LOOSEN UP A LITTLE.
ANYONE ELSE WHO COMES IN THE DOOR TOO. MAKE IT A...
...PARTY...
THEN I SHALL HAVE MEAD...
...AS 'TWAS SERVED IN LEGEND.
FROM THE BROKEN SKULL OF MINE ENEMY!

THOR.
WHAT'S THIS? YOU WANT A REMATCH?
I AIN'T IN THE MOOD RIGHT--
BE SILENT.
KROOM
SO? AM I SUPPOSED TO BOW OR SOMETHIN'?
YOU CHANGED YOUR PLAYCLOTHES, BUT YOU STILL GOT THAT SILVER SPOON LODGED RIGHT UP YOUR--
WHEN WE CLASHED BEFORE, YOU SURPRISED ME. AND THUS, YOU HUMBLED A GOD.
BUT NOW YOU FACE A KING OF GODS--
ENOUGH! AND MORE THAN ENOUGH!
YOU CALL THE WHOLE WORLD YOUR FOE? STRIKE FEAR INTO THE INNOCENT?
WHEN I BEAT YOU-- BREAK YOU LIKE THE BEAST YOU ARE--

--THEN, YOU WILL BOW! AND BE GLAD OF THE MERCY!
SURE. THE WHOLE WORLD BOWIN' AT THE GOD-KING'S FEET-- HOW IT SHOULD BE, RIGHT?
ONLY YA FORGOT SOMETHING, LITTLE LORD THORTLEROY--
--I'M THE HULK!
AND THE HULK DON'T BOW DOWN FOR NOBODY!
NOBODY!
NOT WHEN I WAS WEAK-- WHEN I WAS STUCK AS BANNER!
NOT WHEN THERE WAS NO HOPE AT ALL!
NOT EVEN WHEN I WAS DEAD!
SO IF YOU THINK I'LL GET ON MY KNEES NOW...
KRSH
...THAT'S NEVER GONNA HAPPEN.

NOT FOR ANY OF YOU.

...

THOUGHT PLAN WAS FOR THOR TO TRY *TALKING.*

'CAUSE *THAT* WOULD'VE WORKED.

SO...YOU GONNA BLOW UP *MANHATTAN* THIS TIME, OR WHAT?

IOWA...WAS *REGRETTABLE.*

BUT WE CANNOT ALLOW YOUR *CHAOS* TO GO *UNCHECKED,* HULK.

SEE *REASON.*

EVEN WITH YOUR STRENGTH *RESTORED,* IT IS *SEVEN* AGAINST YOUR...

...ONE...

NO.

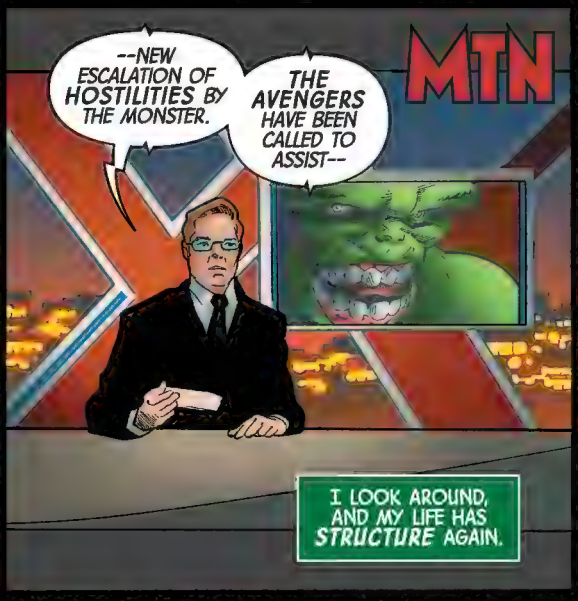
# YOU AND ME
# AGAINST THE WORLD

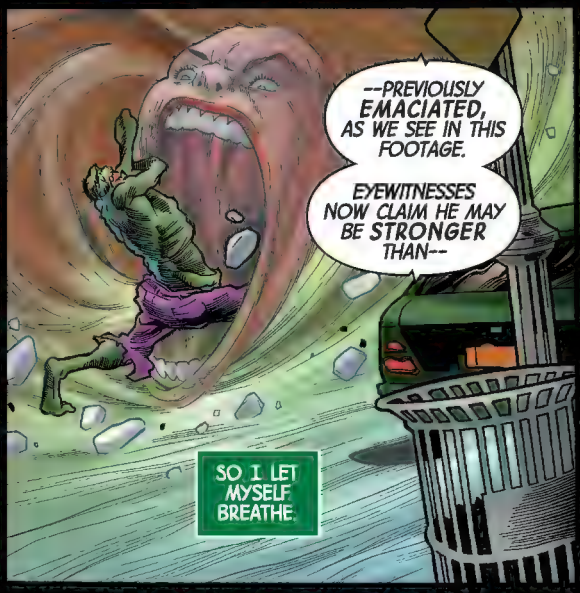
47

"I, LIKE THE ARCH-FIEND, BORE A HELL WITHIN ME, AND FINDING MYSELF UNSYMPATHISED WITH, WISHED TO TEAR UP THE TREES, SPREAD HAVOC AND DESTRUCTION AROUND ME, AND THEN TO HAVE SAT DOWN AND ENJOYED THE RUIN."

– MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY,
*FRANKENSTEIN; OR, THE MODERN PROMETHEUS*

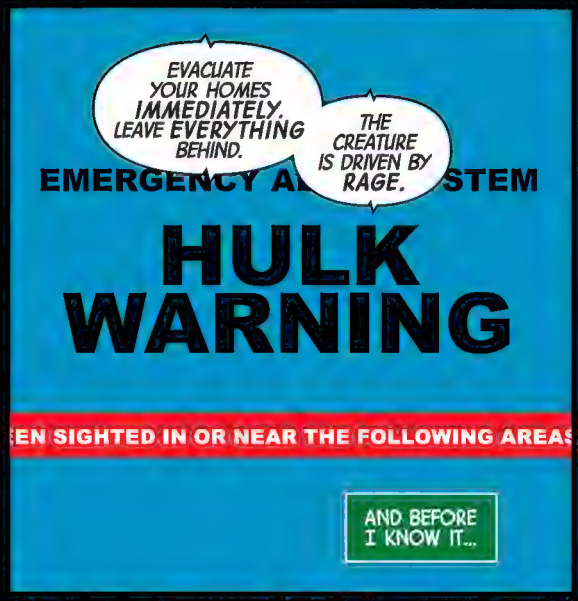
--CREATURE KNOWN AS THE HULK HAS BEEN SIGHTED IN YOUR AREA.
EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM
HULK WARNING
HAS BEEN SIGHTED IN OR NEAR THE FOLLOWIN
IT HAPPENS OVER AND OVER.


--NEW ESCALATION OF HOSTILITIES BY THE MONSTER.
THE AVENGERS HAVE BEEN CALLED TO ASSIST--
MTN
I LOOK AROUND, AND MY LIFE HAS STRUCTURE AGAIN.


--PREVIOUSLY EMACIATED, AS WE SEE IN THIS FOOTAGE.
EYEWITNESSES NOW CLAIM HE MAY BE STRONGER THAN--
SO I LET MYSELF BREATHE.

LIVE
616NEWS
WE'RE GETTING WHAT GLIMPSES WE CAN-- CIVILIANS HAVE BEEN EVACUATED, BUT THE DESTRUCTION IS--
AND THEN I SEE HIM.

DAMN MONSTER WRECKED MY BAR! LIED RIGHT TO MY FACE!
I HOPE THEY KILL THE--
LIVE
THE FACT CHANNEL
COUSIN BRUCE.


EVACUATE YOUR HOMES IMMEDIATELY. LEAVE EVERYTHING BEHIND.
THE CREATURE IS DRIVEN BY RAGE.
HULK WARNING
EN SIGHTED IN OR NEAR THE FOLLOWING AREAS
AND BEFORE I KNOW IT...

MANHATTAN.

...THE *CHAOS* IS BACK.

NO.

IT GATHERS AROUND HIM LIKE *WEATHER*. LEAKS OUT LIKE *RADIATION*. ALL YOU CAN DO IS *SURVIVE* IT.

THE FIRST TIME HE BROUGHT IT TO ME, IT CAME WITH A BULLET IN THE BACK AND A BLOOD TRANSFUSION. A NEW *SELF*--THE *SHE-HULK*.

THE LAST TIME, HE WASN'T EVEN *THERE*--JUST A DREAM OF HIS *ENEMIES*, AND A *GREEN DOOR* THAT LEFT ME AFRAID TO *SLEEP*.

WE DON'T LIVE IN THE SAME WORLD. I'M AN *AVENGER*--WE HAVE RULES AND REGULATIONS, A ROSTER AND A HEADQUARTERS.

EVEN ON THE STRANGEST DAYS I'VE EVER KNOWN, I HAVE *STRUCTURE*.

THEN AGAIN... BRUCE WAS A *FOUNDING* AVENGER.

A HULK THAT'S STRONGER AT *NIGHT*? THAT RISES FROM THE *DEAD*?

YOU THINK *I* DON'T KNOW THE SIGNS?

*ARRGH--*

YOU GOT *BIT*, HULK! *ADMIT* IT!

*YOU'RE A STINKIN' VAMP!*

HULK, PUT HIM *DOWN--*

*BLADE*, RIGHT? QUICK QUESTION.

CAN YOU TURN INTO A *BAT*?

...NO.

NOW'S A GOOD TIME TO *LEARN*.

AND SOMETIMES THAT WORRIES ME.

IRON MAN!
BLADE'S TOUGH ENOUGH TO SURVIVE THE FALL, CAP--
LET'S MAKE CERTAIN OF IT! GO!
FINE-- BUT HE WON'T LIKE IT.
AND THIS IS WHAT THE HULK WANTS-- TO DIVIDE OUR FORCES--
WE RETAIN THE ADVANTAGE OF NUMBERS, MY FRIEND. AND A SINGLE DISCIPLINED WARRIOR IS ENOUGH--
--AGAINST A RAGING BEAST.
KIMOYO-- ENERGY DAGGERS TO MAXIMUM.
DISCIPLINED, HUH?
HOW'D THAT WORK OUT FOR YOU LAST TIME, YOUR HIGHNESS?
THEN? I OFFERED MERCY.
I ATTEMPTED DIALOGUE.
AND THE HULK TAUGHT ME MY LESSON.
NAARRH!
JUST HOW DEEP HIS INFLUENCE ON MY LIFE RUNS.

HOW HARD I TRY NOT TO MAKE HIS MISTAKES.
BETTY, PLEASE.
WORDS... HARDER IN THIS FORM. HARDER FOR HULKS. BUT WE CAN STILL--
NO.
WORDS AREN'T HARD. THEY'RE SMALL. PUNY LITTLE BOXES.
THEY HIDE THOUGHTS.
SO WE SAY LESS.
AND SAY MORE.
YES?
...
YOU KNOW...
THAT'S GOOD--
--KEEP HER DISTRACTED!
AARRHH--
NO!
SHE WAS TALKING--
TO YOU. AND WHILE SHE WAS DOING THAT, SHE WAS CRUSHING MY RIB CAGE. I COULDN'T WAIT FOR YOU TO MAKE NICE.
WE'RE NOT ALL GAMMA PEOPLE, JEN.
HOW OFTEN I ACTUALLY MANAGE TO SUCCEED...

...IN THE FACE OF THIS *WORLD* HE DRAGS ME INTO.

WHAT...?

ALL THE *VIOLENCE* LEAKING OUT OF HIM.

HIS WORLD NEVER *STOPS.*

THE *GAMMA WORLD...*

...FULL OF *GAMMA PEOPLE.*

GENTLEMEN. LADIES.

I'M SORRY WE'RE LATE TO THE *PARTY...*

...BUT WE HAD TO STOP FOR A COUPLE OF *EXTRA GUESTS.*

AS CAROL WILL TELL YOU— WE'RE *GAMMA FLIGHT.* WE'D LIKE TO OFFICIALLY TAKE *CONTROL* OF THIS SITUATION...

...RATHER THAN DO THE *OTHER* THING.

BUT IT'LL BE THE OTHER THING.

*TITANIA'S* TRIED TO KILL ME MORE THAN ONCE. SO HAS *CREEL.* EVEN *PUCK'S* NO BOY SCOUT.

THE OTHERS ARE ONLY *FAMILIAR.* THERE'S A THING WITH *TWO HEADS* THAT MAKES ME WANT TO BURST INTO *TEARS...*

I FEEL DISCONNECTED. DISSOCIATED. THE CHAOS JUST KEEPS *COMING.*

WHAT'S THE SAYING? "THERE'S ALWAYS MORE...
--SUDDEN ENTRANCE OF THE MASTERS OF EVIL-- WAIT--
--I'M BEING TOLD THAT'S GAMMA FLIGHT--
HULK ATTACK ON MANHATTAN
AVENGERS BATTLING GAMMA TERRORISTS
616
"...IT'S ALWAYS WORSE."
I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN YOU, CARL CREEL. ARE THESE YOUR FRIENDS...?
THOR-- IT'S LEONARD SAMSON IN HERE.
OF COURSE IT IS.
SAMSON...?
REALLY. AND, UH...IF YOU COULD RELEASE THE HULK AND HARPY INTO MY CARE...
WHOEVER YOU ARE--GAMMA FLIGHT NO LONGER HAS JURISDICTION ON THE HULK. SO YOU'LL HAVE TO--
COLONEL DANVERS--
--I'M JUST REPORTING ON THIS. BUT THERE'S A LOT MORE GOING ON HERE THAN YOU KNOW. TRUST ME.
WE CAN DO THIS WITHOUT MORE DAMAGE...
I'M SORRY, MS. McGEE.

BUT DAMAGE IS WHAT THE HULK DOES.
WITHOUT SUPERVISION, HE WRECKS LIVES--AND JUDGING BY YOUR EYES, YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT TOO.
IT'S A TOUGH CALL, BUT HE HAS TO BE CONTAINED.
WHAT'S THE TOUGHEST PART? PATTING YOURSELF ON THE BACK AFTERWARD?
IS IT SHOPPING FOR JARS?
ENOUGH, MONSTER.
IS IT GETTING THE BOOT POLISH OFF YER TONGUE?
I SAID ENOUGH!
THOR--
ENOUGH OF YOUR CONTEMPT FOR ALL WHO LIVE! FOR ALL WHO STRIVE TO DO RIGHT!
I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE, HULK!
THE HIDDEN BLIGHT BEHIND THE WORLD TREE! THE UNTAMED STORM THAT TEARS THE LONGHOUSE ASUNDER!
YOU ARE THE DARKNESS OF MIDGARD MADE FLESH!
THOR ISN'T LIKE THIS. NOT NORMALLY.
BUT IT'S AS IF THERE'S RAGE ALL AROUND US. TAINTING THE AIR.

AND I AM DONE WITH THEE!

KRAKOOM

AAARRH!

WHAT COMES NEXT FEELS *INEVITABLE*.

SO MUCH FOR THE *EASY* OPTION.

WAIT-- CHARLENE, WE CAN STILL *TALK*--

SORRY, LEONARD.

*HEADS UP*, FLAG-MAN--YOU AND ME, *RIGHT NOW*--

YOU *KNOW* I ABSORB ENERGY...

THAT'S WHY I DIDN'T BRING A *GUN*.

THIS *MEASURING DEVICE* FEEDS *BIODATA* TO THE *TRANSLOCATION PLATFORM*--

--TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A *SAFE TRIP*.

CAROL...?

I SENT HER TO MY BASE IN *ARIZONA*. I WASN'T USING IT ANYMORE.

CUTE. YOU WANNA DO THAT WITH *SHULKIE*, OR LEAVE HER TO *ME*?

NO. SHE'S WITH *US*.

HULK IS *NOT*--

YOU'VE SEEN THE *DOOR*.

HAVEN'T YOU?

YES.

YES, I'VE SEEN THE GREEN DOOR.

I GIVE YOU A GIFT, HULK! MY RAGE HEAPED ON YOUR ALTAR!
A FITTING TRIBUTE FOR MIDGARD'S GOD OF WRATH!
I THINK I'M SEEING IT NOW.
LOOK! THE SKY PROCLAIMS YOUR TRIUMPH, CREATURE!
FOR IS THIS NOT YOUR WORLD?
SEEING THE EFFECTS. THE CHAOS OF GAMMA, SPILLING OUT.
WELL? LOOK UPON IT!
IS THIS NOT ALL YOU WANTED?
AND ALL WE CAN DO IS SURVIVE...
IS THIS NOT WHO YOU--
--AHRMMPPH!
...AS IT INFECTS ALL OF US.
GLLMM
THE OLD "REGROW-THE-ARM" TRICK. LIKE IT?
NOW TALK SOME MORE ABOUT HOW YOU KNOW ME.

HULK-- HE CAN'T BREATHE--
YEAH? HE CAN'T FINISH WHAT HE STARTED?
AIN'T THAT A SHAME.
THE FIGHT SPIRALS OUT OF CONTROL, AND I'M FROZEN-- NOT KNOWING WHO TO HELP.
AN AMUSING TRICK, HULK.
MY TEAM?
MAY I SEE IT AGAIN?
AAARRGHH!
MY FAMILY?
HULK--STAY STILL! LET ME DRAW A BEAD--
WITH THE TELEPORT GUN? I APPRECIATE THE NONVIOLENT TECHNOLOGY, MA'AM--
AND EVERY CELL IN MY BODY IS TELLING ME THERE'S SOMETHING I'M NOT SEEING-- RIGHT IN FRONT OF MY EYES.
BURIED IN THE CHAOS.

WHAT AM I NOT SEEING?
UNNH!
--BUT I'M AFRAID I CAN'T--
HEY!
OWW!
--ALLOW YOU TO--
THAPP
CAP?
OH NO.
NO.
DON'T YOU KNOW ME?
I SAW THE TWO-HEADED THING, AND I WANTED TO CRY. NOW I KNOW WHY.
I DO KNOW HIM.
IT'S RICK JONES.

RICK?
AND DEL
I...I KNEW YOU WERE ALIVE... BUT...
BUT THIS IS A SICK JOKE.
RICK, WHO BROUGHT THE AVENGERS TOGETHER. WHO'S BEEN WITH BRUCE SINCE THE START.

IN TERMS OF TEAM AND FAMILY...HE'S BOTH.
LIKE ME.
BREATHE, MY FRIEND.
I HAVE THIS.

SAMSON-- WE HAVE TO GO.
I KNOW.
CHARLENE?

I JUST NEED ANOTHER MINUTE, LEN.
I'VE GOT THIS...
AND THE WORST THING? IT WON'T STOP WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN.
IT JUST HOLDS US IN PLACE...

RICK... I'M SO SORRY. I WASN'T THERE.
WHO... WHO DID THIS...?
YER KIDDING, RIGHT?

IT'S WHO IT ALWAYS IS, ROGERS.
IT'S SAM STERNS--
...UNTIL THE TENSION BREAKS.

AND WHEN IT COMES, IT'S *GRACEFUL.*

I'VE *SEEN* T'CHALLA ANGRY. THIS ISN'T *THAT*--IT'S *CALCULATION.* TAKE DOWN THE IMMEDIATE DANGER *FIRST*--AND *THEN* DEAL WITH STERNS.

TAKE *BRUCE* DOWN FIRST.

HE YELLS SOMETHING OVER MY COUSIN'S SCREAM.

SOMETHING ABOUT *NECESSITY*--

--IN THE FACE OF *CHAOS.*

HARPY TAKES A STEP FORWARD, HISSING LIKE *FIRE.*

FOR A SECOND, I THINK SHE'S GOING TO *ATTACK*--

--BUT SHE JUST *STARES.*

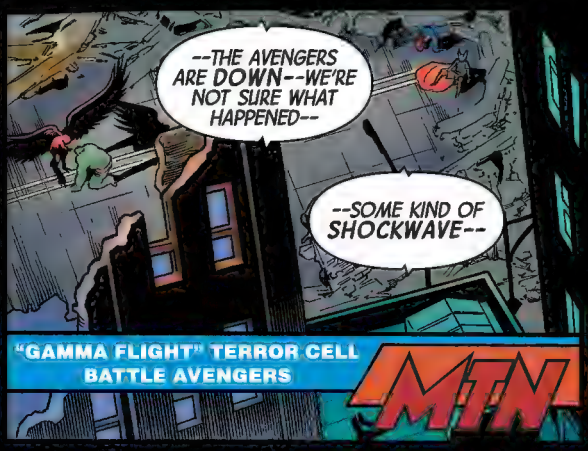
AT *ME.*

DAMN YOU, BETTY.

DAMN *ALL* OF YOU--

# THOR

--FOR MAKING ME CHOOSE.


--THE AVENGERS ARE DOWN--WE'RE NOT SURE WHAT HAPPENED--
--SOME KIND OF SHOCKWAVE--
"GAMMA FLIGHT" TERROR CELL BATTLE AVENGERS
MTN

EVERYBODY ON THE PLATFORM! WE NEED TO GO! NOW!
YOU GOT THE OTHERS, DOC?

I'VE GOT THEM. I'VE GOT THIS.
HULK AND HARPY ARE COMING WITH US.

ALL THE HULKS!
OH, NO-- NO WAY IN HELL--
WHERE BRUCE GOES--

...DAMN.
WHAT HAPPENED WHILE YOU WERE WASTING TIME ON ME...?
JENNIFER...

YOU HEARD THE MAN, THOR.
WHAT HAPPENED HERE?
...
THE HULK HAPPENED, MY FRIEND.

"THE HULK, AND ALL HE BRINGS WITH HIM."
BROOKLYN.
BE SAFE HERE.
FOR LONG ENOUGH TO REST, AT LEAST. THIS PLACE USED TO BELONG TO MAYOR FISK--HE HASN'T NEEDED IT IN A WHILE.
LOT OF OLD GHOSTS HERE...
YEAH. I DON'T WANT TO STAY LONG-TERM.
AND WE NEED SOMEWHERE I CAN GET RICK AND DEL THE HELP THEY NEED...
ME AND CARL HAVE A PLACE-- YOU CAN STAY WITH US FOR A WHILE.
WALTERS AIN'T INVITED.
WHY'D YOU HELP US, ANYWAY? AGAINST YOUR OWN?
HULK... JEN...
I CAN'T SAY WHY. THE WORDS ARE TOO SMALL TO HOLD IT.
STERNS IS TOO BIG.
...JEN NOT EXPECT THAT.
DON'T ASK ME HOW I KNOW--BUT THE AVENGERS WON'T STOP HIM. THEY CAN'T. THEY'RE NOT EQUIPPED.
BEING ABLE TO SURVIVE CHAOS ISN'T ENOUGH.

# CHAOTIC TERRAIN

48

"AND I DREAM OF A GRAVE, DEEP AND NARROW, WHERE WE COULD CLASP EACH OTHER IN OUR ARMS AS WITH IRON BARS, AND I WOULD HIDE MY FACE IN YOU AND YOU WOULD HIDE YOUR FACE IN ME, AND NOBODY WOULD EVER SEE US ANY MORE."

– FRANZ KAFKA,
*THE CASTLE*

THEN.
OH DADDY, DON'T BE SO UNFAIR!
DR. BRUCE BANNER IS ONE OF OUR MOST FAMOUS SCIENTISTS!
...THIS MOST SACRED AND HONORED UNION, A CONDITION NOT TO BE ENTERED INTO LIGHTLY...
...LITTLE CHAIRS... THAT...
...THAT KEEP BREAKING UNDER US...
HAHAHA!
TIME OF DEATH...MAY 9, 10:39 A.M....
YOU'RE IT!
I'M SURE HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING!

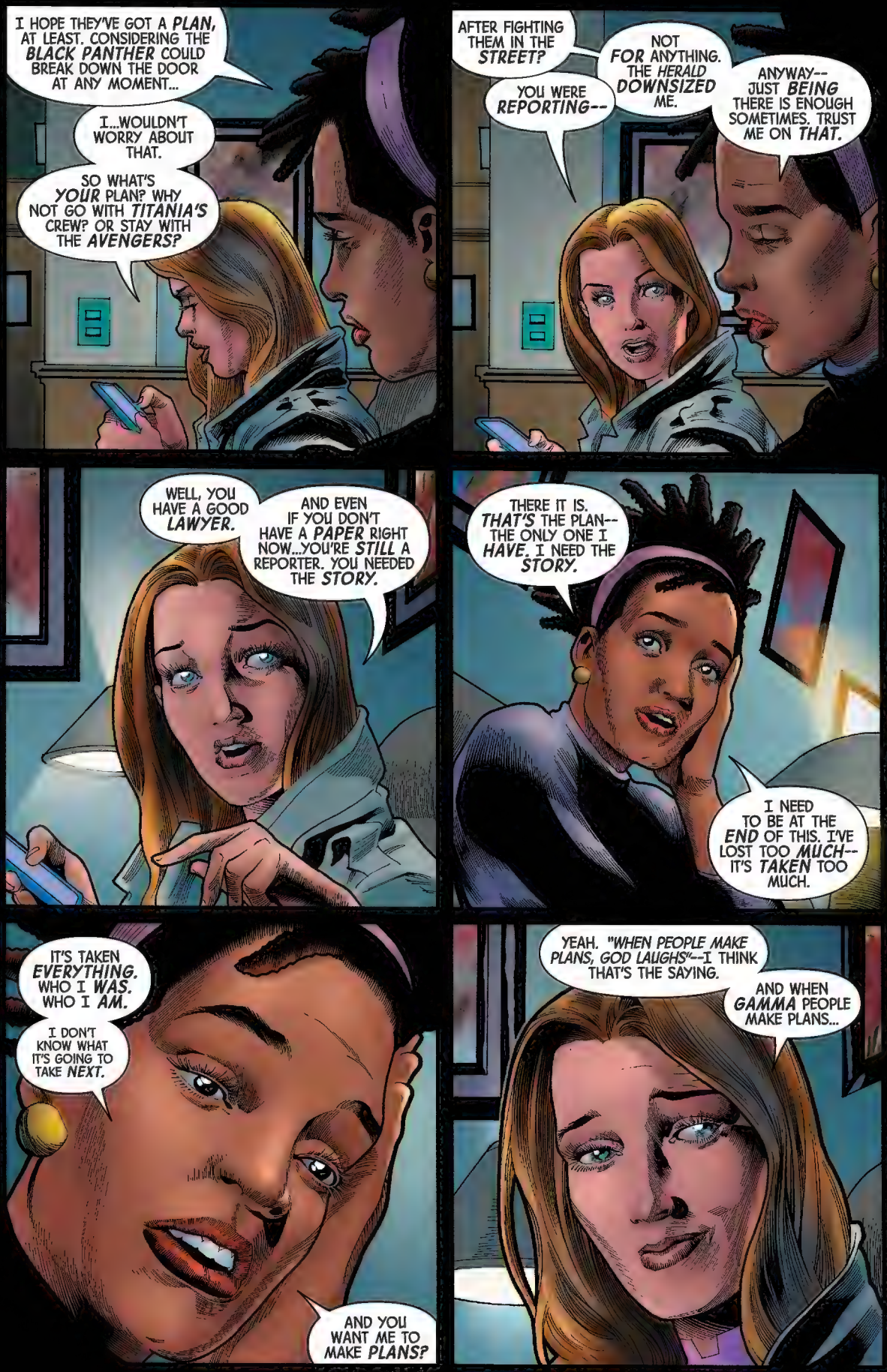
NOW.
A HOTEL SUITE
IN MANHATTAN.
...
I GOTTA ASK.
WHAT ARE WE DOIN'?
DON'T MAKE SO MUCH NOISE.

WE'RE HIDING.
WAS THAT A JOKE?
SINCE WHEN DO YOU START CRACKIN' WISE?
SINCE NOW.
WHY NOT?
YOU DON'T THINK THIS IS FUNNY?
THE OLD MARRIED COUPLE...
YOU'RE A NUT.
AND THIS IS DIFFERENT FROM THAT. YOU MARRIED BANNER.
I AIN'T BANNER, REMEMBER?
"IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH." YOU'RE A PART OF HIM.
NOT THE PART YOU WANT. I'M SECOND CHOICE.
JUST HERE 'CAUSE YOUR REAL HUSBAND'S NOT AROUND--
HULK--
--I DON'T REMEMBER YOU BEING THIS SENSITIVE.

I FORGOT HOW QUICK YOU COULD DO THAT.
HOPE YOU DON'T EXPECT ME TO DO THE SAME, BETTS. I WAS IN BANNER'S BODY ENOUGH TO LAST A LIFETIME--
DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT.
YOU TALK ABOUT BRUCE NOT BEING AROUND--YOU MEAN HE DOESN'T WANT TO COME OUT.
EVEN THOUGH I CAME BACK TO HELP YOU ALL.
BETTY, THAT AIN'T--
JUST LISTEN.
BRUCE HASN'T BEEN PRESENT WITH ME SINCE HE RETURNED FROM THE DEAD. BEFORE THAT, EVEN.
HE AVOIDED ME FOR MONTHS. THEN WHEN HE FINALLY GOT THE COURAGE TO FACE ME--WHEN HE GOT ME KILLED--
--IT WOKE UP WHAT WAS INSIDE. THE GAMMA--AND EVERYTHING ELSE I'D BEEN ABSORBING FOR YEARS.
HE DIDN'T LIKE THE LOOK OF THAT.
THE LOOK OF ME.
YOU ALWAYS DID, JOE. RIGHT FROM THE START, YOU ALWAYS SAW ME.
THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE.

"THIS IS ME," HUH?
THIS IS ME. THIS IS US. IT'S OURS.
DON'T BE YOU, HULK.
DON'T SMASH IT UP.
...
DAMN.
BANNER AIN'T HIDIN' FROM YOU, BETTS. HE'S GONE. HE'S IN HELL, OR... SOMEPLACE BELOW IT...
IT'S LEADER STUFF. STERNS IS BACK, AND HE'S THERE, AND...HE'S GOT BANNER.
WHEN STERNS TOOK HIM--I WAS WEAK. IN CHAINS IN BANNER'S HEAD. I COULDN'T HAVE STOPPED IT.
BUT I WAS DOWN THERE AGAIN JUST BEFORE YOU SHOWED UP. DOWN IN HELL, AS A HULK--STRONG AS I EVER WAS.
AND I DIDN'T LOOK FOR BANNER.
I JUST LOOKED OUT FOR ME.
YOU LEFT BRUCE IN HELL?

WELL, THEY'RE BACK TO SCREAMING AT EACH OTHER.
BEATS THE ALTERNATIVE, I SUPPOSE.
I'M STARTING TO THINK I SHOULD HAVE GONE WITH TITANIA AND THE OTHERS. SHE'D PROBABLY ONLY HAVE TRIED TO KILL ME ONCE...
...WHAT?
SOMETHING ON MY FACE?
UH, SORRY.
I GUESS I'M NOT USED TO SEEING THE REAL YOU...
HA! WELL, THAT'S THE THING, JACKIE-- IN A LOT OF WAYS, MY HULK SELF IS THE REAL ME.
WHAT I LIKE THE WORLD TO SEE, AT LEAST.
LUCKY FOR US, THAT MEANS JEN WALTERS IS A LOT LESS FAMOUS-- ESPECIALLY IN A BORROWED COAT.
"NO QUESTIONS, PLEASE. I'M A RECLUSIVE HEIRESS."
AND JEN WALTERS HAS THE MONEY FOR A SUITE LIKE THIS--WITH LOTS OF ROOM AND GOOD SOUND-PROOFING.
GOOD ENOUGH, I HOPE.


I HOPE THEY'VE GOT A PLAN, AT LEAST. CONSIDERING THE BLACK PANTHER COULD BREAK DOWN THE DOOR AT ANY MOMENT...
I...WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT THAT.
SO WHAT'S YOUR PLAN? WHY NOT GO WITH TITANIA'S CREW? OR STAY WITH THE AVENGERS?
AFTER FIGHTING THEM IN THE STREET?
YOU WERE REPORTING--
NOT FOR ANYTHING. THE HERALD DOWNSIZED ME.
ANYWAY-- JUST BEING THERE IS ENOUGH SOMETIMES. TRUST ME ON THAT.
WELL, YOU HAVE A GOOD LAWYER.
AND EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE A PAPER RIGHT NOW...YOU'RE STILL A REPORTER. YOU NEEDED THE STORY.
THERE IT IS. THAT'S THE PLAN-- THE ONLY ONE I HAVE. I NEED THE STORY.
I NEED TO BE AT THE END OF THIS. I'VE LOST TOO MUCH-- IT'S TAKEN TOO MUCH.
IT'S TAKEN EVERYTHING. WHO I WAS. WHO I AM.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S GOING TO TAKE NEXT.
AND YOU WANT ME TO MAKE PLANS?
YEAH. "WHEN PEOPLE MAKE PLANS, GOD LAUGHS"--I THINK THAT'S THE SAYING.
AND WHEN GAMMA PEOPLE MAKE PLANS...

"...GOD SMASHES.
"AND WE NEVER SEE IT COMING.
"WE JUST HAVE TO REACT. MAKE THE BEST OF IT, IF WE CAN.
"OR THE WORST.
"WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?"

THAT'S YOUR ADVICE?
"LIFE SUCKS, WEAR A RADIATION SUIT"?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO TELL YOU, MS. McGEE. I'VE BEEN A HULK FOR A LONG TIME, AND UP UNTIL RECENTLY...
...I HONESTLY THOUGHT MY LIFE WAS UNDER CONTROL.
BUT THAT WAS JEN WALTERS THINKING.
HULK KNOWS BETTER.
GREAT.
CAN I USE YOUR PHONE? MINE WON'T CHARGE, AND I NEED TO MAKE SOME NOTES.
...YES.

"HULK IS DONE WITH IT."
THE BAXTER BUILDING.
SO. I JUST GOT AN ENCRYPTED TEXT--FROM JEN, ON THE OLD FF PROTOCOL.
SHE SAYS SHE'S OKAY. THE HULK AIN'T RAGIN'--SHE'S GOT IT ALL UNDER CONTROL.
SHE'LL BRING US IN IF SHE NEEDS US--BUT RIGHT NOW, SHE'S WORKIN' OUT THE NEXT MOVE.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, FOLKS?
SHOULD WE TELL HER WE ARE TOO...
...OR KEEP THAT UNDER WRAPS?
"TELL ME, THEN."

WHAT ELSE AREN'T YOU SAYING?
NOTHIN'. IF I WANTED TO LIE, I COULDA SAID I DIDN'T REMEMBER. WE USUALLY DON'T.
LOOK--I WAS IN THE MOMENT, BETTS. REACTING. AND NOW IT'S DONE.
ME AND THE KID GOT OUT, BANNER'S STILL THERE. IT'S DONE.
AND I'M SORRY, BUT THERE'S NOTHIN' I CAN DO TO--
YOU'RE SORRY.
...
SURE. OF COURSE.
NO.
YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO BE SORRY.
YOU WANT TO LOOK SORRY.
BUT THAT'S JUST FOR CAMOUFLAGE. TO HIDE THE REAL YOU.
THE YOU THAT JUST CARES ABOUT YOU.

SOMETIMES I CAN IGNORE THAT ABOUT YOU.
SOMETIMES YOU CAN EVEN MAKE ME HAPPY.
WE LAUGH TOGETHER.
SOMETIMES.
SOMETIMES ISN'T ENOUGH.
THIS IS YOU.
THE SELFISH PART OF BRUCE. THE PART THAT TAKES.
BUT NOT THE PART THAT HIDES. LIKE BRUCE DID.
NOT THAT PART, I THOUGHT.
BUT I FORGOT. YOU HID A LIFE FROM ME.
"JOE FIXIT," IN VEGAS. HIDING.
YOU, BRUCE, ALL OF YOU. ALWAYS HIDING.
AND I ALWAYS COME BACK. SO YOU CAN HIDE AGAIN.
THAT'S ALL WE HAVE. ALL WE ARE.
HIDE AND SEEK.

YEAH. WELL.
I THINK I'M *DONE* HIDING.
YOU WANT TO MAKE A MOVE *NOW?*
THEY'RE STILL *HUNTING* US...
NO. I *MEAN* IT.
I DON'T WANNA *HIDE* FROM YOU NO MORE.
WELL. NO POINT ANYWAY.
THERE'S NOTHING I HAVEN'T *SEEN.*
...
THERE'S ONE THING.

"A KID GOT BEAT HALF TO DEATH BY HIS FATHER.
"AND WHILE HIS FATHER WAS SLEEPIN' IT OFF-- WHILE HIS MA WASN'T THERE--
"--HE WATCHED A BLACK-AND-WHITE MOVIE THROUGH HIS BLACK EYES.
"AND SOMEWHERE IN THERE WAS AN IDEA OF WHAT A GROWN-UP IS:
"SOMEBODY WHO COULD TAKE THE PAIN."
THAT'S WHAT I STARTED AS.
A KID'S IDEA OF A MAN.
I TALK TOUGH, I CRACK WISE. AND IF YOU PISS ME OFF-- MAYBE I'LL BEAT YOU HALF TO DEATH.
MAYBE I'LL HURT YOU SO BAD YOU NEVER RECOVER. MAYBE I'LL ENJOY IT.
'CAUSE THAT'S WHAT A GROWN-UP IS.
BUT THAT AIN'T ME ANYMORE.
I DON'T WANT IT TO BE.
SO?
SO WHAT?

SO... I LOVE YOU.
SO THAT.
WHAT?
I DON'T WANNA NOT SAY IT ANYMORE. I'M SICK OF NOT SAYIN' IT.
IT WAS ALWAYS YOU, BETTS. FOR ME? IT WAS ALWAYS YOU.
ALWAYS AND ALWAYS.
WHAT DO I DO WITH THAT?
YOU HID FROM IT. A WHOLE LIFE IN VEGAS. I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD.
I CRIED. I HURT. YOU HURT ME.

NOT BRUCE.
YOU.
I KNOW.
DO YOU?
I...WE, ALL OF US, THE WHOLE DAMN SYSTEM...
WE'RE MESSED UP, BETTS. WE'RE MESSED UP AND WE'RE DUMB AND WE'RE ANGRY AND WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO FIX IT.
"WHY HULK HURT SO MUCH?" THAT'S ALL OF US. WE ALL DON'T KNOW.
ALL THIS TIME AND WE ALL DON'T KNOW A DAMN THING.
BUT I WANNA LEARN. I WANNA BE BETTER.
I WANT TO BE A BETTER ME.

...
DO YOU?
OOF.
THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT THE NEW YOU, BETTS.
YOU DON'T PULL PUNCHES.
"WHO THE HELL KNOWS" IS THE ANSWER. BUT SINCE I STARTED COMIN' OUT IN THE DAY--I'M THINKIN' ABOUT STUFF MORE. THINKIN' ABOUT PEOPLE MORE.
AND I LIKE HOW THAT FEELS. IT'S A GOOD THING.
SO IS IT GOOD ENOUGH? AM I GOOD ENOUGH?
AM I A GOOD PERSON NOW?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
...
BETTY?

OKAY.
GUESS I'LL COUNT TO A THOUSAND.

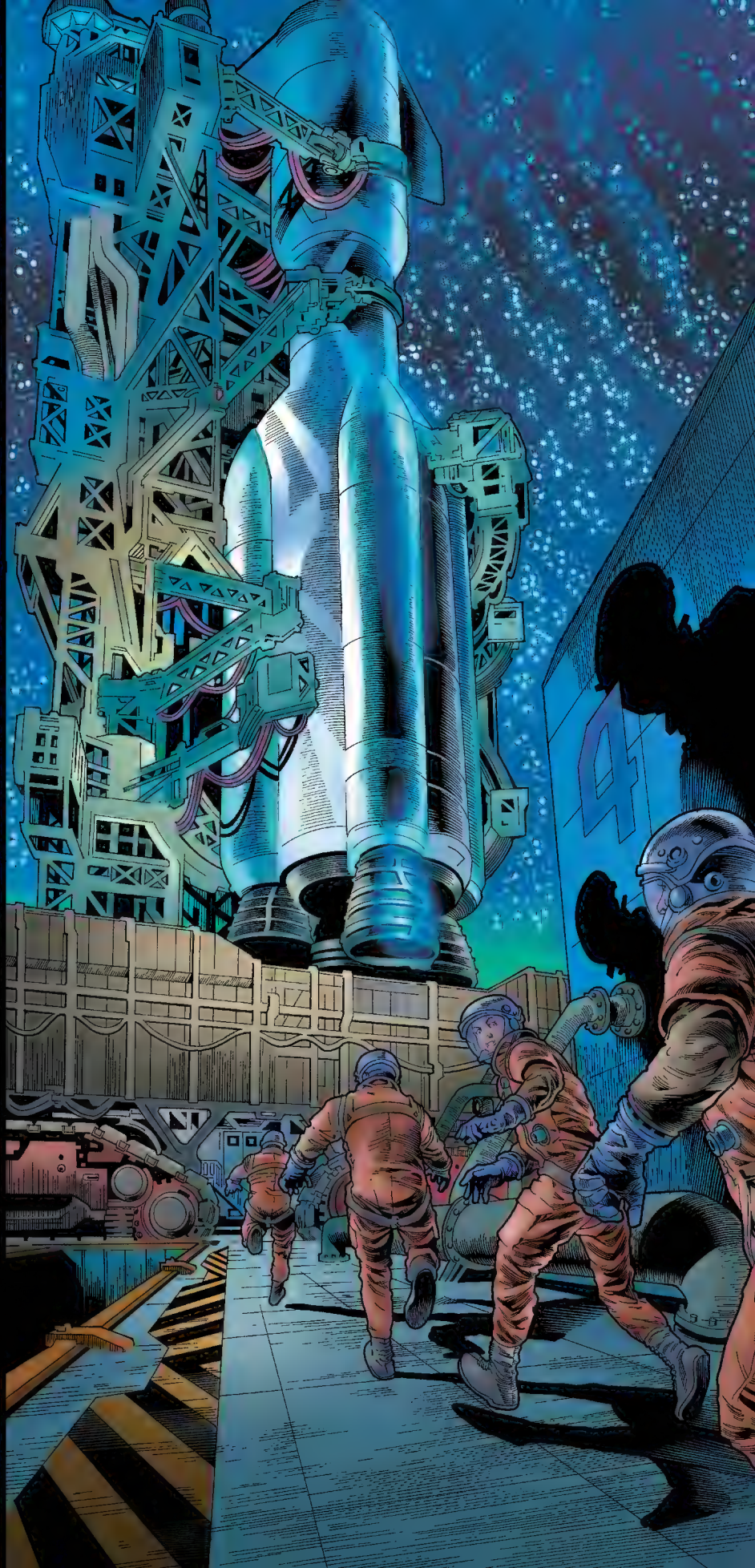
BETTY TOOK OFF.
DON'T EVERYONE LOOK SO SHOCKED.
...
HULK NOT SHOCKED.
SO... WHAT'S THE *PLAN*, HULK?
...GOOD QUESTION.
I'VE BEEN *REACTING* SINCE SHADOW BASE FELL. *HIDING.* LETTING THE WORLD COME TO *ME.*
THAT AIN'T ME. NOT NO MORE.
YOU WANNA KNOW WHO'S A GOOD PERSON? *NOBODY'S* A GOOD PERSON.
NOBODY'S ANYTHING BUT WHAT THEY'VE *DONE*-- AND WHAT THEY'VE *GOT* DONE.
TIME TO START GETTING THINGS DONE.

# HIDING PLACES

49

"THROUGH ME YOU PASS INTO THE CITY OF WOE:
THROUGH ME YOU PASS INTO ETERNAL PAIN:
THROUGH ME AMONG THE PEOPLE LOST FOR AYE.
JUSTICE THE FOUNDER OF MY FABRIC MOV'D:
TO REAR ME WAS THE TASK OF POWER DIVINE,
SUPREMEST WISDOM, AND PRIMEVAL LOVE.
BEFORE ME THINGS CREATE WERE NONE, SAVE THINGS
ETERNAL, AND ETERNAL I ENDURE."

– DANTE ALIGHIERI,
*THE VISION OF HELL*


THE ROCKET WASN'T A BOMB.
THE COUNTDOWN WASN'T A MURDER ATTEMPT.
THE SCIENTIST HADN'T KILLED HIS OWN FATHER.
HE HID NO SECRETS FROM THE WOMAN HE LOVED.
THE TEENAGER HAD NO SUBLIMATED DEATH WISH.
AND THE MAN WHO BECAME A MONSTER WAS THE FIRST TO SUGGEST HELPING HUMANKIND.
IN A LOT OF WAYS, THE STORY OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR IS AN ODDLY AMERICAN FAIRYTALE. FOUR PIONEERS, BREAKING THE RULES FOR A JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN.
WHEN THEY CAME BACK, THEY WERE AVATARS OF SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS, OF THE FAMILY UNIT, OF COURAGE AGAINST THE ODDS. AND IF ANY PART OF THEM LOOKED MONSTROUS FROM THE OUTSIDE, THAT WAS ONLY BECAUSE WE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND.
THEY WERE AMERICA AS IT LIKES TO SEE ITSELF--AS SYMBOLIC AS THE ROCKET THAT TOOK THEM TO THE STARS.
WHICH WASN'T A BOMB.
BUT AS ABOVE, NOT SO BELOW.

THE HULK WALKED, AND WE WALKED WITH HIM, THROUGH RAIN-SLICK STREETS SO EMPTY THEY FELT LIKE A DREAM.

I WAS THERE TO GET THE STORY, I TOLD MYSELF. AS IF THE STORY WAS SOMETHING I COULD FIND AND PACKAGE AND LET GO, INSTEAD OF SOMETHING INSIDE ME, PART OF ME, DRIVING ME ON.

THE OTHER HULK--JEN WALTERS, BRUCE BANNER'S COUSIN--HAD BEEN IN CONTACT WITH HER OLD FRIEND BEN GRIMM EVER SINCE THE FIGHT WITH THE AVENGERS. IF WE WANTED TO RESCUE BRUCE FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION, BEN HAD A WAY TO DO IT.

I WAS ANGRY. WHAT IF IT WAS A TRAP? DIDN'T SHE KNOW THE RISKS?

BUT SHE KNEW. SHE WAS OUR AMBASSADOR FROM THE RAREFIED WORLD OF THE SUPER HEROES, WHERE EVERY FIGHT IS A MISUNDERSTANDING, WHERE IT CAN ALL BE SMOOTHED OVER WITH A LITTLE TIME OR THE RIGHT WORD IN THE RIGHT EAR.

I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT WORLD. BUT IT EXISTS.

THE HULK JUST NODDED. HE KNEW WHERE HE WAS GOING, NO MATTER WHAT. WITH BETTY GONE, I DON'T THINK HE CARED HOW.

SO HE JUST WALKED, AND SO DID WE.

IN THE WORLD OF THE SUPER HEROES, WHEN SOMETHING SMASHES YOUR HOME TO RUBBLE, THEY JUST BUILD IT BACK AGAIN, BETTER THAN NEW.
NOTHING EVER REALLY CHANGES.
THE LOBBY WAS BEAUTIFUL, AS QUIET AND SERENE AS A CHURCH. IT WAS A PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO WAIT IN COMFORT-- AND A LITTLE AWE--FOR THE ATTENTIONS OF THE MIGHTY. TO PRAY FOR THEIR AID.
AS WE ENTERED, JEN EXHALED, AND I COULDN'T TELL IF THAT WAS RELIEF OR SOME DEEP SADNESS. SHE WAS IN HER PLACE OF POWER, BUT SHE DIDN'T QUITE FIT THERE ANYMORE.
THE HULK DIDN'T FIT AT ALL. HE LOOKED *WRONG* HERE--SOMETHING PROFANE, AN UNHOLY THING IN A HOLY PLACE.
HE KEPT WALKING.

AND THEN-- THERE THEY WERE. WAITING FOR US, FACES WREATHED IN JUDGMENT.
THE SUPER HEROES.

JEN PUT HER ARM UP--A GREEN STEEL BAR, PADDED WITH MUSCLE. FOR A MOMENT, I FELT LIKE I WAS ON A ROLLER-COASTER, READYING FOR THE DROP.

THE HULK STEPPED FORWARD.

THE ROOM BRISTLED. HE MADE THEM ANGRY JUST BY STANDING THERE, NOT SAYING A WORD-- AS IF THE ANGER WAS FLOWING OUT OF HIM AND INTO THEM.

HE DIDN'T SPEAK.

HE ONLY SMILED.

THE ROOM ERUPTED.

STEVE ROGERS TRIED TO CALM THINGS, BUT THE ANGER WAS FLOWING NOW-- A FLOOD TIDE HEADING FOR US. THOR LAUNCHED INTO A SPEECH, BUT I COULDN'T HEAR HIM ABOVE ALL THE OTHER SPEECHES, ALL THE OTHER PROCLAMATIONS AND PRONOUNCEMENTS.

THE HULK KEPT SMILING.

I DIDN'T SEE WHO THREW THE FIRST PUNCH. SOMEONE MUST HAVE.

BUT THE FIGHT WAS ON.

MAYBE IT ALWAYS HAD BEEN. MAYBE IT ALWAYS WILL BE.

MAYBE EVERY FIGHT THE HULK HAS IS THE SAME FIGHT...

...EVER SINCE THE BEGINNING.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE FIRST GAMMA BOMB TEST, BRIAN BANNER DIED FROM A VIOLENT ASSAULT IN THE GRAVEYARD WHERE HIS WIFE REBECCA WAS BURIED. IT WAS THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE DAY SHE HAD DIED.

BRIAN MURDERED HER.

HE FORCED HIS SON BRUCE TO LIE ABOUT IT IN COURT--TO BE COMPLICIT IN HIS OWN MOTHER'S KILLING--BUT THE TRUTH CAME OUT. SOMETIMES IT WORKS THAT WAY. BUT HE PLED INSANITY AND WAS COMMITTED, RATHER THAN JAILED, AND RELEASED INTO BRUCE'S CARE.

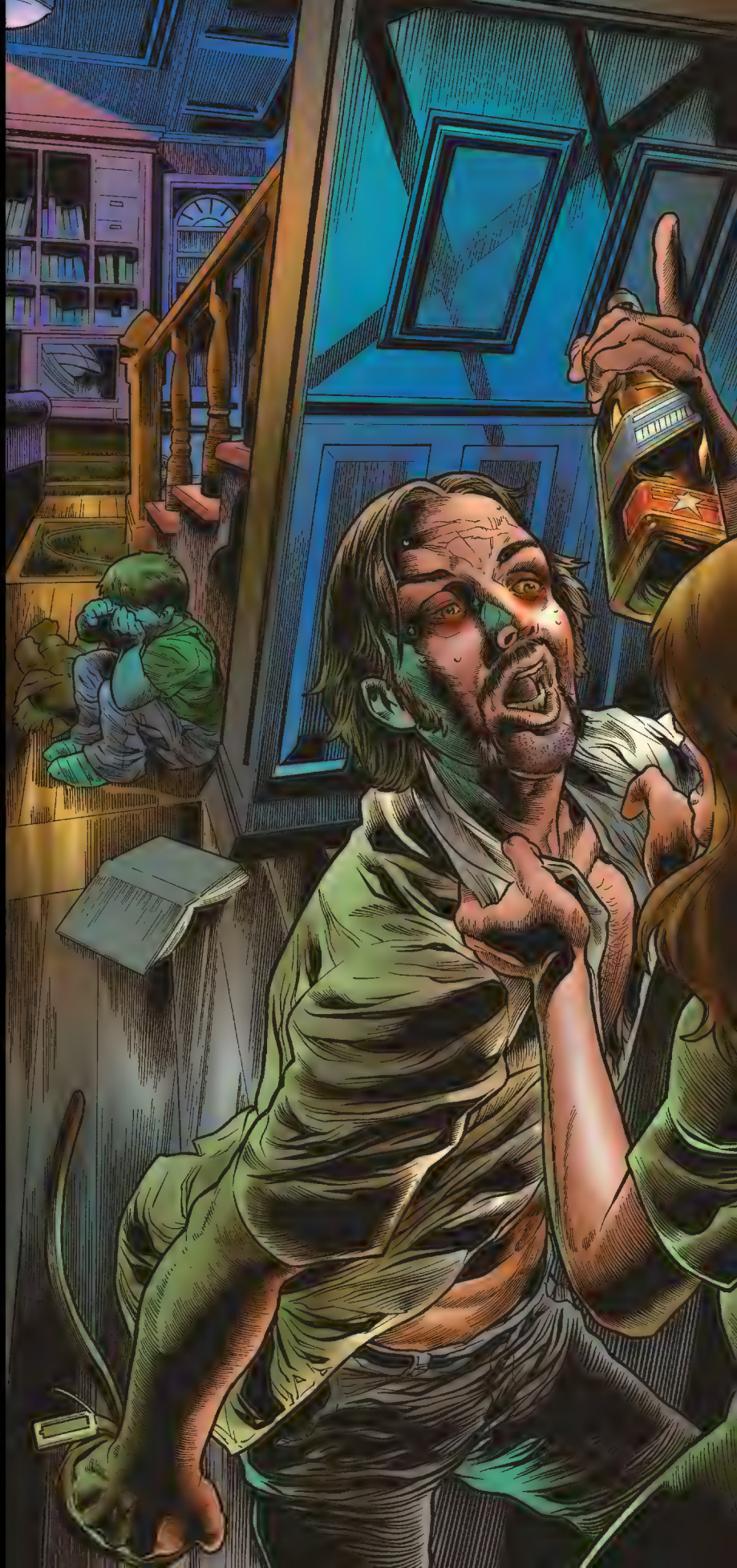
THE OFFICIAL STORY OF HIS DEATH WAS THAT HE WAS THE VICTIM OF A MUGGING--BUT FOOTPRINTS ON THE GRAVES MATCHED BRUCE'S SHOE SIZE, AND A PLASTIC STAR LEFT AT THE SCENE CAN ALSO BE SPOTTED HANGING ABOVE BRUCE'S CRIB IN FAMILY PHOTOS.

THIS EVIDENCE WAS IGNORED BY THE DAYTON POLICE--WHO WOULD HAVE KNOWN REBECCA, AND PERHAPS EVEN KNOWN HER BROTHER-IN-LAW, SHERIFF MORRIS WALTERS.

SOMETIMES IT WORKS THAT WAY TOO.

SOMETIMES IT DOESN'T WORK AT ALL.

MAYBE EVERY FIGHT THE HULK HAS IS THE SAME FIGHT.



MAYBE EVERY FIGHT THE HULK *LOSES* IS THE SAME FIGHT TOO.

JEN WAS SHIELDING ME, YELLING AT THEM ALL--HER COMRADES IN ARMS, HER FRIENDS--TO STOP. TELLING THEM I WAS A CIVILIAN, THAT THEY WERE PUTTING ME IN DANGER.

I DON'T KNOW IF THEY HEARD HER OVER THE NOISE. THE SOUND OF THEIR FISTS AND THEIR ENDLESS WEAPONS. THE SOUND OF THE HULK'S BONES BREAKING AND KNITTING BACK TOGETHER.

IT WAS A CACOPHONY. IT FELT LIKE THE END OF EVERYTHING, AND IT FELT LIKE IT'D NEVER END. MAYBE IT NEVER WILL.

BUT HE NEVER FELL.

SOMETHING IN HIM WOULDN'T LET HIM GIVE IN. I THINK THAT WOULD'VE BEEN TRUE EVEN IF THEY'D KNOCKED HIM COLD, KILLED HIM, SAWED HIM IN PIECES, PUT HIM INTO JARS... HE'D STILL NEVER FALL.

BECAUSE IF HE DID, HE'D NEVER GET UP AGAIN.

I DON'T KNOW IF I HAVE IT IN ME TO FORGIVE HIM. BUT I KNOW HIM NOW BETTER THAN I DID.

AND *THAT* PIECE OF HIM, I RECOGNIZE.

DID THEY SEE THEMSELVES IN HIM AS WELL?

WAS THAT WHY THEY COULDN'T HELP ATTACKING? BANNER SAW THE HULK IN MIRRORS, BUT THE HULK IS A MIRROR TOO--A REFLECTION THAT REFLECTS BACK AT YOU. AND THESE WEREN'T GAMMA PEOPLE--DID THE HULK SEEM LIKE A CONTAGION TO THEM? WAS HE UNCLEAN?

WE'LL NEVER KNOW.

THE NOISE STOPPED. THOR'S HAMMER KEPT FALLING, BUT IT ONLY HIT SILENCE. AN INVISIBLE SPACE AROUND THE HULK TOOK SHAPE, AND WIDENED.

THE SHOUTING AND YELLING FELL TO GRUMBLING, THEN TO NOTHING. MAYBE THE FORCE-FIELD WAS BLOCKING WHATEVER EFFECT THE HULK WAS HAVING. OR MAYBE IT WAS JUST DOING WHAT THEY ALL WANTED--KEEPING THE HORROR AWAY FROM THOSE UNTOUCHED BY IT.

THE DOORS OPENED BEHIND US.

I'D ONLY SEEN THE FANTASTIC FOUR ON TV. UP CLOSE...THEY WERE DIFFERENT.

REED RICHARDS' BODY MADE LITTLE ALIEN SOUNDS AS HE STRETCHED INTO THE ROOM.

JOHNNY STORM'S FACE WAS HIDDEN IN FLAME. HE COULDN'T SEEM TO TURN IT DOWN, OR OFF.

AND SUE RICHARDS STARED AT AND THROUGH EVERYTHING, SEEING SHAPES IN THE AIR NOBODY ELSE COULD GUESS AT--AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I FELT WE MUST HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON.

MAYBE THE HULK WAS RUBBING OFF ON THEM TOO. MAKING THE FAIRYTALE AMERICAN FAMILY SEEM STRANGE AND UNKNOWABLE. OR MAYBE THEY'D BEEN LIKE HIM ALL ALONG.

MAYBE THERE WAS SOMETHING PRIMAL IN THEM, FROM SOME *OTHER PLACE.*

IT WAS BEN GRIMM--THE THING--WHO LOOKED THE MOST HUMAN. *"WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YA ALL?"* HE SAID, GENUINELY AGGRIEVED. *"DID THEY HURT YA, PAL?"*

THE HULK LOOKED ALMOST SAD WHEN BEN SAID THAT.

BUT HE DIDN'T TAKE BEN'S HAND.

HE NEVER SAID A WORD AS WE LEFT THE WORLD OF THE SUPER HEROES BEHIND US. HE HADN'T BEATEN IT, IN THE END.
BUT IT HADN'T BEATEN HIM, EITHER.
BEN GRIMM'S VOICE SEEMED TO COME FROM FAR AWAY. *"YER OKAY, PAL. YER OKAY."*
IT WAS A VOICE WITH ALL THE DEEP GRAVEL OF THE HULK'S AND MORE--BUT WARMER SOMEHOW. I THOUGHT OF MY GRANDFATHER, AT MY MOTHER'S FUNERAL. HE'D SPOKEN OF THE LAST DAY, WHEN GOD WOULD CALL THE SOULS OF THE DEAD. CALL THEM AND JUDGE THEM.
*"YER OKAY, PAL. YER OKAY."*
WE WALKED DEEPER INTO THE BUILDING, PASSING THROUGH CORRIDORS OF FLASHING LIGHT AND SOUND. SECURITY SYSTEMS AND STRANGE EXPERIMENTS. WONDERS AND PORTENTS.
UNTIL FINALLY, WE CAME TO THE GATE.

THE FOREVER GATE.

IT WAS A PORTAL TO WHEREVER YOU WANTED TO GO, BEN SAID. A JUNCTION TO ANYWHERE. THE KIND OF CASUAL MIRACLE THE FANTASTIC FOUR DEALT WITH EVERY DAY.

DR. RICHARDS TRIED TO EXPLAIN IT. HIS VOICE FALTERED AS HE SPOKE OF PARTICLES, WAVES, FREQUENCIES, GAMMA AND COSMIC RADIATION--AS IF HE WAS TRYING TO SPEAK, IN THE ONLY LANGUAGE HE KNEW, OF THINGS EVEN HE HAD NO WORDS FOR. EVENTUALLY, HE FALTERED, SHOOK HIS HEAD AND LET BEN TALK FOR HIM.

IT WAS SIMPLE, BEN SAID. THE GATE WOULD SCAN THE HULK, EVERY CELL OF HIM, AND USE WHAT IT FOUND IN HIM TO FIND WHERE WE WERE GOING. IT MIGHT NOT BRING THE HULK TO THE LEADER'S DOOR, BUT IT'D AT LEAST TAKE HIM TO THE LEADER'S BACKYARD--AND MAYBE THAT WAY, HULK COULD SURPRISE HIM. IT WAS A FAIR CHANCE--NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS.

WHEN HE SAID IT, IT MADE SENSE. WE WAITED FOR THE HULK TO SAY SOMETHING BACK.

THE MACHINE BEGAN TO HUM.

THE HULK LOOKED INTO THE GATE.

AND THE GATE LOOKED INTO THE HULK.

AS THE MACHINE ANALYZED THE DATA, SEARCHING THROUGH POSSIBILITIES, IMAGES FLICKERED AND FLOWED IN THE CRACKLING RED PLASMA.

FOR A MOMENT, I SAW FOUR FIGURES TAKE SHAPE--A BIG-HEARTED SCIENTIST AND HIS LOVING WIFE, A GRUFF EX-MILITARY MAN, A CAREFREE TEENAGER. A FAMILY OF FOUR. YOU COULD SEE THE LOVE BETWEEN THEM ALL.

THEY'D NEVER TRIED TO KILL EACH OTHER.

THEY WERE WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN, IF THE ORDER OF EVENTS HAD BEEN JUST A LITTLE DIFFERENT, IF THE COIN HAD LANDED THE OTHER WAY UP.

SOMEONE HAD TO FLY THE ROCKET.

SOMEONE HAD TO BUILD THE BOMB.

THE HULK SAW THEM TOO.

HE KEPT STARING, AS THE IMAGES MERGED BACK INTO STATIC. HE DIDN'T SPEAK.

BEFORE, HIS SILENCE FELT STUBBORN, SINGLE-MINDED--BLOODY-MINDED, EVEN. NOW, AS THE GATE OF HELL YAWNED IN FRONT OF HIM...IT WAS SOMETHING ELSE.

SOMETHING LIKE *FEAR*.

BEN SPOKE, GENTLY. THE FOUR WOULD BACK THE HULK UP WHEN THEY COULD, HE SAID--BUT THIS GATE, RIGHT HERE AND NOW, WAS JUST FOR HIM. HE'D OPEN IT WHEN HE WENT THROUGH, AND HE'D CLOSE IT BEHIND HIM.

DR. RICHARDS LOOKED QUIETLY APOLOGETIC. HE'D DONE HIS BEST.

RED PLASMA BOILED IN FRONT OF US. BRUCE BANNER WAS WAITING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF IT. SO WAS THE LEADER.

SO WAS THE STORY.

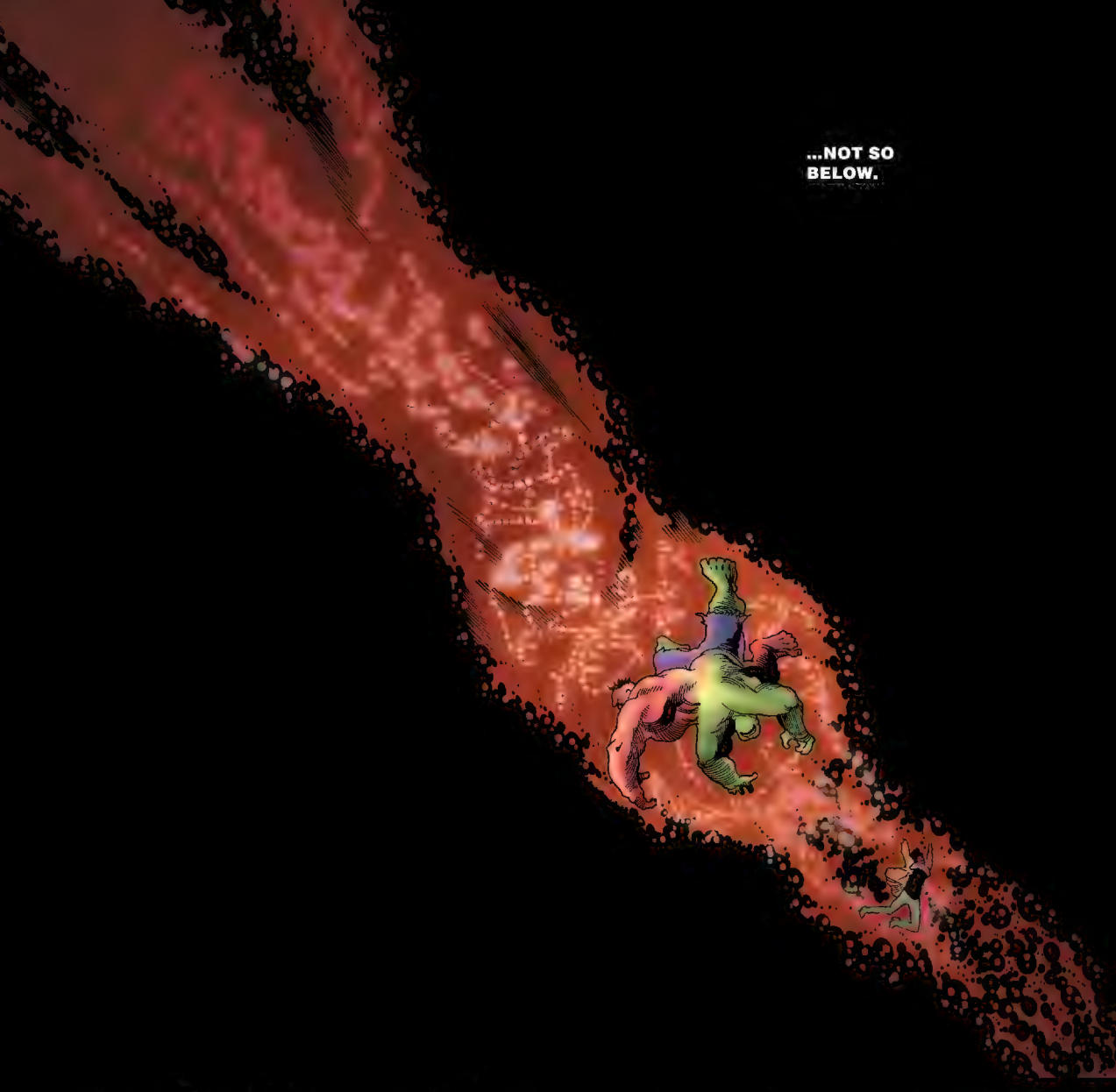
THE STORY THAT WAS PART OF ME. THAT HAD BROUGHT ME FROM ARIZONA TO THE EDGE OF SPACE, THAT HAD BROKEN MY LIFE AND BECOME IT. THE ANSWER TO ALL THE QUESTIONS I COULDN'T WALK AWAY FROM.

SO I REACHED OUT...

...AND THEN I STEPPED THROUGH WITH HIM.
IT WAS BREAKING THE RULES. AND... I CAN'T LIE.
THAT MOMENT-- THE SPLIT-SECOND DECISION TO MAKE THAT JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN--IT WAS *EXHILARATING*. A RUSH OF ADRENALINE AS I TOOK MY LIFE IN MY HANDS FOR WHAT I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT.
IT FELT LIKE RIDING A ROCKET.

BUT IT WASN'T A ROCKET.

AND AS ABOVE...




# ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE

# IMMORTAL HULK: TIME OF MONSTERS

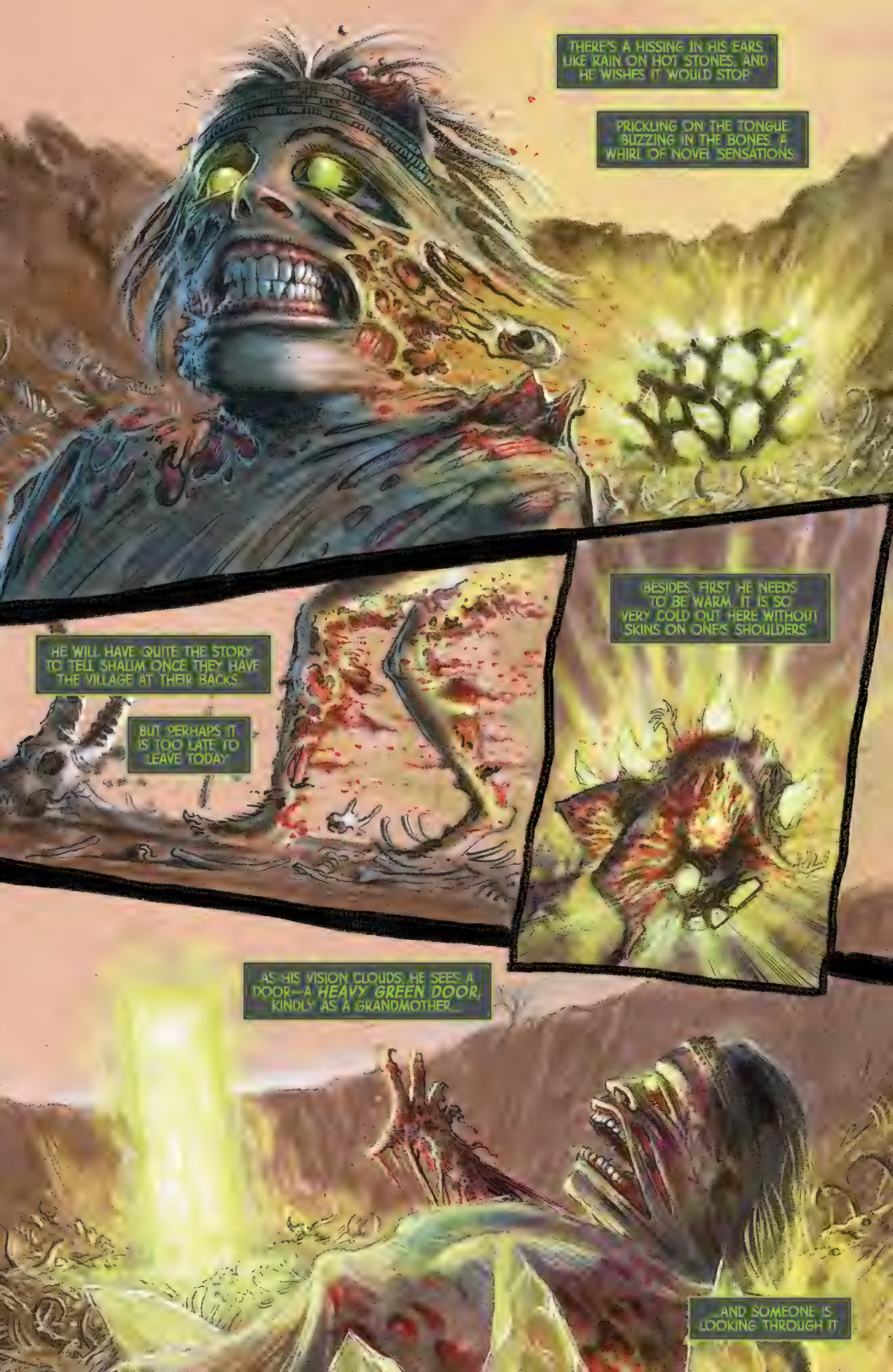
“I BEHOLD THEE ENKIDU; LIKE A GOD THOU ART.
WHY WITH THE ANIMALS
WANDEREST THOU ON THE PLAIN?”

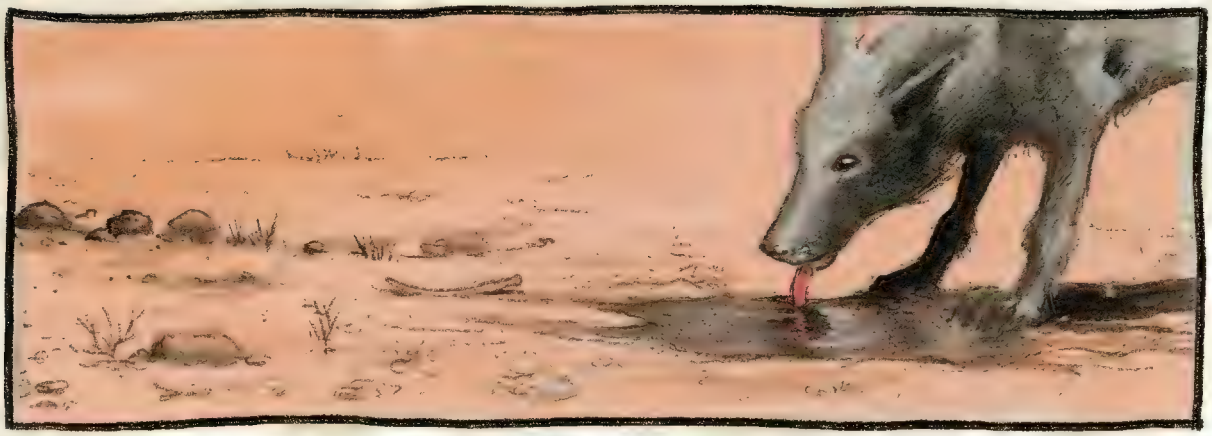
– *THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH*,
TRANSLATED BY STEPHEN HERBERT LANGDON

JORDAN, 9,500 BCE.
YOU'RE YOUNG, TAMMUZ. YOU WON'T REMEMBER WHEN THE MOTHER GODDESS STILL WATCHED OVER US WITH HER GOOD GREEN EYE.
WE THOUGHT IT A BLESSING AT FIRST, BUT WE WERE A PUNY PEOPLE THEN--PUNY AND PROUD. WE TOOK TALL RYE AND SWEET MILK FOR OUR BIRTHRIGHT.
BUT THE MOTHER GODDESS IS A TEACHER ABOVE ALL, SO SHE PUT OUT HER EYE AND CAST IT HERE, THE BETTER TO MARK THE SQUANDERING OF HER GIFTS.
THE GROUND SHOOK. THE SKY WAS A PILLAR OF ASH AND GREEN FLAME. WE DANCED AND WEPT FOR JOY.
BUT SOON ALL THAT FELL BENEATH THE GAZE OF THE MOTHER GODDESS' GOOD GREEN EYE BECAME ROTTED.
EVERY GRAIN. EVERY GAZELLE. EVERY PEST AND CUR.
ALL WITHERED.

YOU CAN FEEL IT HERE, CAN'T YOU...?
MAGIC SO STRONG IT STINGS THE EYES.
ADAD-- HONORED ELDER-- PLEASE.
LISTEN. SUCH MAGIC CAN BE RECKONED WITH NEITHER EASILY NOR CHEAPLY.
OUR LANDS BLACKENED LIKE A DEAD TOOTH.
KNOWING NO BETTER, OUR CHILDREN BECAME RESTLESS.
THEIR FAITH-- YOUR FAITH-- FALTERED.
MY SON LOVES YOU AS A BROTHER, TAMMUZ. HE WOULD FOLLOW YOU ANYWHERE.
THAT IS WHY I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO LEAVE.
I KNOW WHAT YOU SAY ABOUT ME BEHIND MY BACK, BOY...
THAT MY WITS HAVE FLED. THAT I AM LEADING OUR VILLAGE TO RUIN.
BUT I KNOW WHAT THE EYE WANTS.
ALL THOSE SUMMERS OF FLASHING SICKLES AND EASY GAME.
WE TOOK... ENDLESSLY.
SOMETHING IN MY CHEST... BROKEN.
BUT WE DID NOT GIVE.

WE ARE STARVING, ADAD.
EVEN THE WILD HERDS HAVE ABANDONED US. THEY CAN TASTE THE DEATH IN OUR WATER.
WAIT... WHY ARE WE HERE?
WHY HAVE YOU BROUGHT ME BEFORE THE EYE?
THE ANCESTORS SPOKE TO ME.
THEY SAID THE GENTLE SEASONS WILL RETURN. IT CAN ALL BE PUT BACK TOGETHER.
BUT NOT WHILE THE HEAVENS ARE HALF-BLIND.
NO!
NYAARGH!!!
THERE IS NO GREAT REMEDY WITHOUT GREAT SACRIFICE, TAMMUZ!
I WILL TELL SHALIM YOU WERE UNAFRAID!
BUT... BUT LEAVING WASN'T...
MY IDEA.
BUT IT'S TOO LATE
TAMMUZ FEELS THE GOOD GREEN EYE'S GAZE AND HE IS OVERTHROWN


THERE'S A HISSING IN HIS EARS LIKE RAIN ON HOT STONES, AND HE WISHES IT WOULD STOP
PRICKLING ON THE TONGUE BUZZING IN THE BONES A WHIRL OF NOVEL SENSATIONS
BESIDES, FIRST HE NEEDS TO BE WARM. IT IS SO VERY COLD OUT HERE WITHOUT SKINS ON ONE'S SHOULDERS
HE WILL HAVE QUITE THE STORY TO TELL SHALIM ONCE THEY HAVE THE VILLAGE AT THEIR BACKS
BUT PERHAPS IT IS TOO LATE TO LEAVE TODAY
AS HIS VISION CLOUDS, HE SEES A DOOR—A HEAVY GREEN DOOR, KINDLY AS A GRANDMOTHER
...AND SOMEONE IS LOOKING THROUGH IT



"I KNOW, MOTHER. HE'S *LATE.*"

WHEEEEEN?

WE WERE SUPPOSED TO FLEE THIS PLACE AND ITS SOUR MAGIC AT FIRST LIGHT, BUT YOU KNOW TAMMUZ; HE *DITHERS.*

PLEASE WATCH OVER HIM, MOTHER.

I HAVE A *FEELING...*

SHALIM?

TTT! STILL PECKING AT YOUR MOTHER'S BONES, I SEE. YOU SHOULD LET HER REST.
FATHER! EVERYONE WAS LOOKING FOR YOU.
YOU'RE PACKED.
FOR A LONG JOURNEY, FROM THE LOOKS OF THINGS.
UH... TAMMUZ AND I WERE GOING TO FORAGE FOR DATES NEAR THE SHELL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE.
THE PALMS ARE STILL GOOD THERE.
AUROCHS MEAT AND BARLEY BREAD.
WERE YOU PLANNING TO BE GONE UNTIL THE NEXT NEW MOON?
...
FATHER, HAVE YOU SEEN TAMMUZ?
NO.
WHY DO YOU ASK?
YOU ALREADY KNOW, DON'T YOU?
WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM?
WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM, YOU WORM-ADDLED OLD JACKAL?!

I'VE SAVED US ALL, BOY!
KRAK!
ADAD! ADAD!
LOOK AT ME, MILKSOP!
HKKK!!!
TAMMUZ DIDN'T MAKE A SOUND WHEN THE EYE ATE OF HIS FLESH. NOT A SOUND!
HE UNDERSTOOD WHAT CIVILIZATION IS, SHALIM--WHAT IT COSTS!
HONORED ELDER--
LEAVE US!
THERE'S A BEAST IN THE GORGE! ENORMOUS! ENOUGH TO FEED US ALL FOR...
PLEASE, YOU MUST COME!
IT WORKED. THANK YOU, ANCESTORS.
COME, SHALIM. BRING YOUR BOW.

"YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO *REDEEM* YOURSELF YET."
TAMMUZ DOESN'T REMEMBER HOW HE GOT HERE. WAS ADAD WITH HIM? BUT IT HARDLY MATTERS NOW.
HE KNOWS HE SHOULD FIND SHALIM. HE KNOWS HE SHOULD *STICK TO THE PLAN.*
BUT HIS MIND IS *DANCING WITH FOXFIRE.* SO MANY *IDEAS.* SO MANY WAYS HE CAN *HELP.*
THE RAIN IS *POISON,* SO HE SHOULD REALLY START *THERE.*
*STREAMS.* THERE ARE STREAMS *UNDERGROUND. CLEAN. PURE.* WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS, THEY CAN BE TAPPED.
THE GLEAMING ROCK IS KEY. HE WILL CRUSH IT. HE WILL *SMASH* IT.
WITH FIRE HE WILL MELT THE GLEAM LIKE TALLOW AND SHAPE IT CUNNINGLY.
THE FIRE WILL MAKE THE TOOLS. THE TOOLS WILL MAKE *THE FUTURE.*

AND OF COURSE, THERE'S THE POWER. TORRENTS OF IT. ENOUGH TO BREAK WORLDS.
BUT LIKE THE STREAMS UNDERGROUND THAT FLOW WITHOUT SURCEASE, IT IS TOO CLEAN AND TOO PURE TO BE DANGEROUS.
HE WILL SHARE THIS POWER WITH HIS VILLAGE-- WITH ALL THE VILLAGES. FROM THE SHELL PEOPLE OF THE WEST TO THE BONE TALKERS OF THE EAST.
HE WILL CARRY THEM ALL INTO TOMORROW-- ON HIS BACK IF NEED BE.
THEY NEED A LEADER. IF ONLY FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

SHALIM WILL WAIT FOR HIM. SHALIM WILL UNDERST—

NO.

HEAVE!

NO!

GRANDFATHERS... LOOK AT IT.

PAIN! NOISE!

SHLUK!

WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS?

HE HAS BROUGHT GIFTS! HE *IS* A GIFT!

SKLICH!

SKLICH!

SKLICH!

ENOUGH!

TAMMUZ IS CHANGED, BUT THESE ARE STILL *HIS PEOPLE*. HE NEED ONLY EXPLAIN, AND ALL WILL BE WELL.

GLK! HRAAAGGH!!!

HE TRIES TO WREST WORDS FROM HIS LUNGS, BUT HIS THROAT GRINDS THEM INTO CHAFF.

KRA-KOOM

THEN THERE IS A SOFT WHICKERING ON THE WIND, AND HE KNOWS ALL IS LOST.

THWWWK!!

THE DOOR IS LIGHTER THIS TIME.

PERHAPS YOU'RE NOT SUCH A MILKSOP AFTER ALL, EH, SHALIM?

...

THAT BIRTHMARK...

TAMMUZ?

WH... WHERE AM I?
YOU BEAR MY MARK
NO.
THERE WAS ANOTHER.
I TURN MY FACE TOWARD YOU
THEY HAVE ALL TURNED THEIRS FROM ME. EVEN SHALIM.
I WOULD HAVE GIVEN THEM EVERYTHING.
I AM THE ONE BELOW ALL
WITH THESE HANDS I BREAK
WITH THIS MOUTH I HOWL
BREAK. YES, I THINK I WOULD LIKE TO BREAK THINGS NOW.
I WOULD LIKE THAT VERY MUCH.
MY WEAPON IS HATE
GOOD.
AS IS MINE.

ITS *LIVER*, SHALIM! LOOK AT IT!
YOU EARNED IT. EAT YOUR FILL.
...
LATER, PERHAPS.
FRIENDS!
LOOK AT US!
BELLIES FULL OF MEAT...
GREASE DRIPPING DOWN OUR CHINS...
ALL IS AS IT SHOULD BE.
*ALMOST.*
FIRST, LET US HAIL THE TRUE AIM OF MY SON, SHALIM!
THE POOR CREATURE WAS FRANTIC WITH PAIN, AND HE SHOWED IT A *HUNTER'S MERCY.*

BUT WHILE OUR SPEARS AND ARROWS FELLED THE BRUTE, THEY DID NOT SUMMON IT.
IT WAS THE MOTHER GODDESS' GIFT!
BY NOW YOU WILL ALL HAVE REALIZED THAT SOMEONE IS MISSING FROM THIS FEAST...
TAMMUZ. DEAR TAMMUZ.
MY SISTER TOOK HIM IN WHEN THE FEVER TOOK HIS MOTHER. HE WAS FAMILY.
TODAY HE OFFERED HIMSELF WILLINGLY TO THE MOTHER GODDESS' GOOD GREEN EYE.
I KNOW THIS BECAUSE I WAS WITH HIM AT THE END.
SHLORP
HE BEGGED ME TO TELL YOU NOT TO MOURN HIM.
"HE CROSSED OVER WITH A SMILING HEART BECAUSE HE KNEW HIS PEOPLE'S FUTURE WAS ASSURED."

THERE HAS BEEN SOME TALK--ESPECIALLY AMONG THE YOUNG--OF ABANDONING OUR LANDS...
OF FORAGING IN THE WETLANDS LIKE OUR HALF-WILD ANCESTORS.
BUT LOOK! THIS MEAT IS A BOON FROM THE MOTHER GODDESS HERSELF!
IT IS PROOF THAT WE CAN KEEP FAITH WITH OUR WAYS AND STILL HAVE ALL WE NEED!
TAMMUZ HAS SHOWN US THE PRICE THE EYE DEMANDS. IT IS THE PRICE OF CIVILIZATION.
BUT WE NEED NOT PAY IT OURSELVES!
TOMORROW I WILL TAKE A HUNTING PARTY TO THE VILLAGE OF THE BONE TALKERS.
FATHER...
WE WILL--NN!--SURPRISE THEM. WE WILL SUBDUE THEM, AND WE WILL OFFER THEM UP TO THE GOOD GREEN EYE.
AND WE WILL BE MADE WHOLE.
A-DAD!
A-DAD!
A-DAD!
FATHER, ITS EYE!

WAIT. I FEEL... GLLKKK!!!
THE FIRE GUTTERS
ADAD, WHAT IS-- HALCCHH!!!
THE CHEERING STOPS
THERE IS RIPPING. THERE IS PAIN. THE FEAST IS OVER.
GOOD. PERHAPS NOW THEY WILL UNDERSTAND
THE GREEN DOOR OPENS LIKE A FLOWER
NO!
HE IS RETURNED

WITH A THOUGHT, HE SUMMONS HIMSELF TO HIMSELF...AND SMILES.
THE POWER FEELS DIFFERENT THIS TIME. IT IS NOT MEANT FOR BUILDING.
HIS GOOD GREEN EYE WIDENS, DRINKING IN EVERY DELECTABLE TWITCH AND SHUDDER OF HIS MURDERERS' BODIES.
...UNTIL ONLY ONE REMAINS.
I...I DIDN'T KNOW, TAMMUZ! I SWEAR!

TAMMUZ KNOWS HE COULD SPEAK NOW IF HE WISHED— SHAPE THE ROCKSLIDE IN HIS CHEST INTO WORDS

SPEAK THE *WHY* OF IT. TEACH THE *LESSON* OF IT.

HE COULD STILL LEAVE WITH SHALIM AS THEY PLANNED. EVEN NOW. EVEN AFTER THE *SCREAMS* AND THE *RENDING*. IT MIGHT NOT BE TOO LATE.

THEY COULD STILL FIND THAT BETTER PLACE IN HIS MIND.

HE COULD STOP.

HE COULD STOP MAKING THEM PAY.

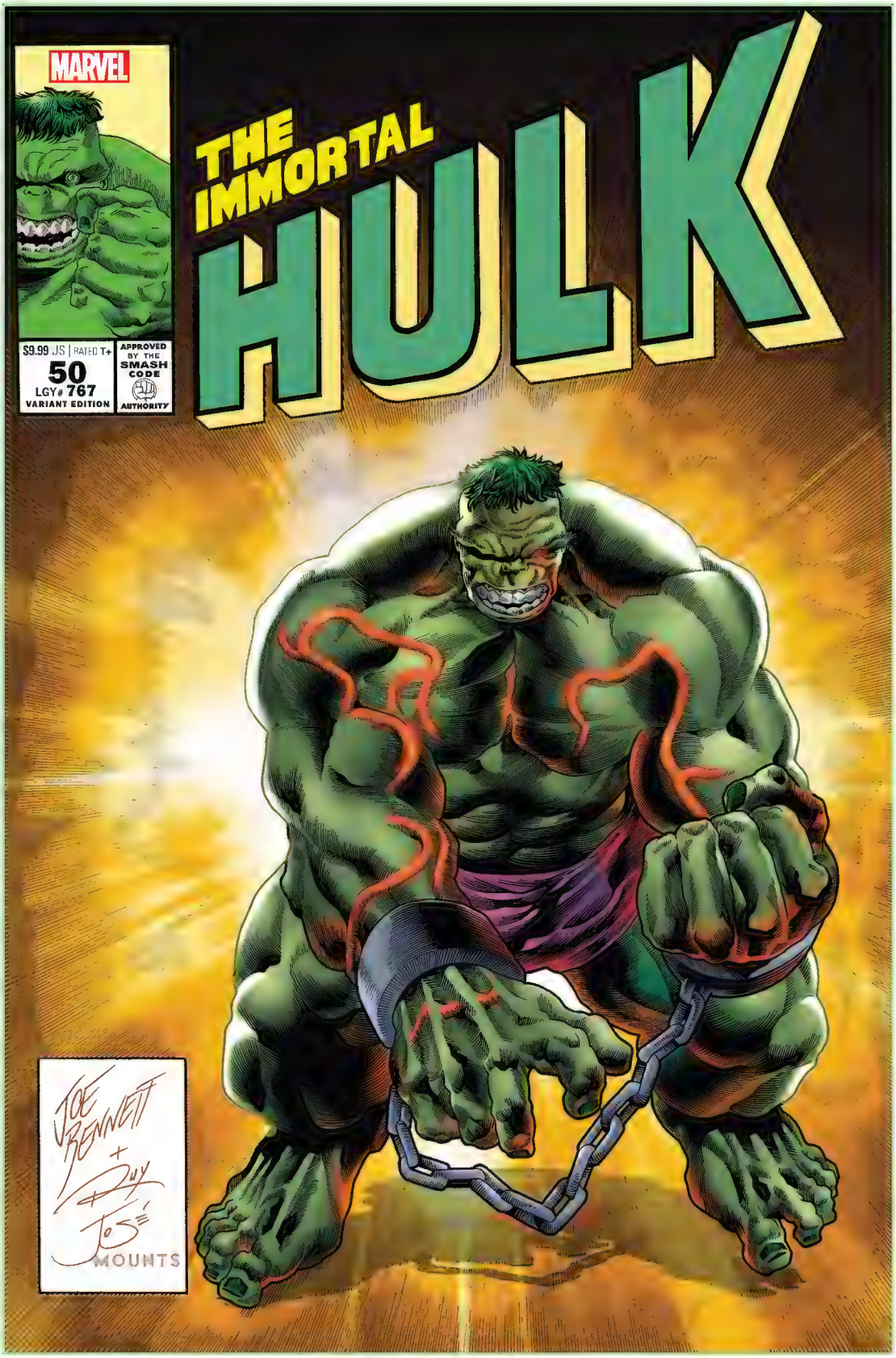
IF HE WISHED.

SHLKK

BUT THERE IS A VOICE OF GREEN FIRE IN HIS HEAD. FROM A PLACE BELOW ALL PLACES.

A VOICE THAT SAYS "NEVER."

# TIME OF MONSTERS




#50 HOMAGE VARIANT BY JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

50

#50 VARIANT BY MR GARCIN

"I AM HE THAT LIVETH, AND WAS DEAD; AND, BEHOLD, I AM ALIVE FOR EVERMORE, AMEN; AND HAVE THE KEYS OF HELL AND OF DEATH."

– REVELATION 1:18

GET OUT OF THE *SNOW*, ROBERT, FOR GOD'S SAKE. YOU WALKED ACROSS TOWN IN *THIS?*

YOU MUST BE *POSSESSED.*

OHIO
1901

WHAT WAS IT MOTHER USED TO SAY? "YOU'LL CATCH YOUR DEATH."
SHE'D HAVE A FIT IF SHE COULD SEE YOU NOW...
I'M SURE SHE CAN, BROTHER.
FROM HER SEAT ON HIGH, WHERE SHE IS DOUBTLESS PRIVY TO THE PLANS OF THE LORD--WHO WILL ALWAYS WATCH OVER THE RIGHTEOUS.
THIS ISN'T YOUR CHURCH, REVEREND. YOU CAN SPARE ME THE SERMON.
ANYWAY, HAS NO PRIEST EVER SUFFERED FROSTBITE?
HOW DO YOU KNOW THE GOOD LORD DIDN'T PLAN FOR YOU TO FREEZE TO DEATH ON THE WAY, EH?
BECAUSE I STAND HERE BEFORE YOU, SAMUEL.
AND I FIND MYSELF QUITE WARM.
QUITE WARM INDEED.
IF YOU SAY SO.
STILL, AGAINST WEATHER LIKE THIS, I'LL PUT MY FAITH IN THICK WALLS...

...AND THE FIRES OF KNOWLEDGE.
DEAR GOD.
THIS STUDY OF YOURS LOOKS GRUBBIER EVERY TIME I LAY EYES ON IT.
WELL, I CAN'T AFFORD A HOUSEKEEPER. AND ANNE DOESN'T...DIDN'T... LIKE COMING IN HERE.
HAVE YOU HAD WORD FROM HER?
SHE SENDS LETTERS. SHE'S IN OKLAHOMA WITH HER FOLKS AND LITTLE PHILIP. SHE HOPES I'LL SELL UP AND JOIN THEM ON THE FARM.
SHE STILL HAS THIS FANCIFUL IDEA THAT MY WORK IS SOMEHOW HURTING ME...THAT IT'S UNHEALTHY...
HRM.
I CAN'T THINK WHAT COULD HAVE PROVOKED SUCH A NOTION.

THAT WAS A GIFT FROM A PALEONTOLOGIST I KNOW.
SOME FOOL DUG IT UP IN THE OTTOMAN REGION, TRIED TO PASS IT OFF AS A NEW DINOSAUR.
IT'S A CLEAR FAKE--THE BONES AREN'T EVEN FOSSILIZED. BUT EVEN SO, IT'S WELL-MADE...
IT'S GROTESQUE. WHY KEEP SUCH A THING?
IT WAS A GIFT. AND IT'S A LITTLE REMINDER TO BE HONEST IN MY OWN WORK.
"THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD" AND ALL THAT.
...
AND WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE GRACE OF GOD?
EXCUSE ME? WHAT IN HELL'S GOT INTO YOU TODAY, ROBERT?
...NEVER MIND.
WHAT IS THIS? THIS WORK YOU'RE ENGAGED IN?
GREAT WORK, BROTHER. THAT'S RADIUM YOU'RE HOLDING. THAT'S THE FUTURE.
OUR FUTURE.

OURS?
YOU HAVE A CHILD ON THE WAY, DON'T YOU? EVERY CHILD CAN USE A WEALTHY UNCLE.
RADIO-ACTIVITY IS THE NEW SCIENCE-- THE NEW FRONTIER.
JUST LAST YEAR IN FRANCE, PAUL VILLARD DISCOVERED A NEW RADIO-ACTIVE RAY-- DIFFERENT FROM THE ALPHA AND BETA RAYS RUTHERFORD NAMED...
SO A GAMMA RAY?
VILLARD'S A MODEST MAN. THE EMANATION REMAINS NAMELESS.
IF THIS EXPERIMENT GOES AS WELL AS IT SHOULD, THOUGH...
...PERHAPS IT'LL BE THE STERNS RAY. NAMED FOR US.
YOU MARK MY WORDS, BROTHER.
THIS IS A NIGHT OUR GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN WILL HAVE CAUSE TO REMEMBER.
THIS... WILL MAKE US IMMORTAL.

# OF HELL AND OF DEATH

ARIZONA. YEARS AGO.
COME ON, BABY GIRL.
THE--THE MEN FROM THE ARMY ARE GONNA TAKE US SOMEWHERE SAFE--
WHERE? WHERE'S SAFE?
HE--HE TOOK OUR HOME--
WE'RE ALIVE. YOU'RE ALIVE. THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS RIGHT NOW.
BUT HE-- EVERYTHING, ALL OUR THINGS--
OH GOD, MOM'S THINGS-- ALL OUR PHOTOS OF MOM--
WHY WOULD HE DO THAT TO US? WHAT DID WE EVER DO, DAD?
WHY IS HE HERE AT ALL...?
I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T KNOW WHY THERE'S A HULK.
BUT WE GOT THROUGH THIS. WE WILL GET THROUGH THIS.
I SWEAR WE WILL.

THERE'S A PLAN FOR US, BABY GIRL. THERE'S A REASON.
THERE'S GOT TO BE.

THE BELOW-PLACE. NOW.
RUINS AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE, AND THE HULK.
I'M GETTING DEJA VU.

RIGHT--YOU'VE BEEN DOWN HERE TOO.
THAT WAS BEFORE DEVIL HULK WOKE ME UP TO DO MY THING...
NOT QUITE WHAT I MEANT.
BUT...THAT DOES RAISE A QUESTION.
DO YOU THINK HE KNEW?
KNEW WHAT?
THAT YOU--ALL OF YOU, THE BRUCE BANNER SYSTEM--YOU'D NEED A HULK WITHOUT ANY GAMMA IN HIM.
JOE FIXIT, IN BANNER'S BODY--WAITING TO BE FILLED UP WITH SOMETHING ELSE. THE OPPOSITE OF GAMMA.
THE COSMIC RAY HULK, RIGHT WHEN THE SYSTEM NEEDED HIM.
...
HOLY CRAP, McGEE. I NEVER PUT THAT TOGETHER.
NO WONDER YOU'RE A REPORTER.
UNEMPLOYED REPORTER.
NOT AFTER TODAY, YOU AIN'T.
IF WALKING INTO HELL AIN'T NEWS, IT'S GOTTA BE HUMAN INTEREST.

BUT WHO THE HELL KNOWS, IS THE ANSWER. BIG DADDY DEVIL WAS ALL INTUITION.
I DON'T KNOW IF HE WAS SEEING LITTLE DETAILS, MAKING LITTLE CONNECTIONS, DOING THE SUPER-SMART THING--OR JUST PLAYING A HUNCH OUT.
OL' SNAKESKIN ALWAYS LIKED TO PLAY HUNCHES...
...
HULK MISS HIM.
AW, GREAT. WE WOKE UP THE GUILT HULK.
YOU OKAY BACK THERE? 'CAUSE I TOLD YOU TO GO BEFORE WE LEFT--
HULK NOT OKAY.
HULK SCARED. THIS PLACE...THIS PLACE WILL HURT HULK. HULK CAN FEEL IT.
WHY HULK HERE?
WHY HULK HERE?
...
I WISH I KNEW.

I MEAN, UH...WELL, LAST TIME YOU WERE SHARING A BODY.
IT WAS BRUCE BANNER WHO WAS SEPARATE...
BECAUSE THAT'S HOW DAD WANTED IT.
WHOEVER PAYS THE PIPER CALLS THE TUNE.
BRIAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN TRAPPED HERE, BUT HE STILL MADE THE RULES.
UNTIL THE LEADER CAME ALONG, ANYHOW. SEEMS LIKE HE'S MORE IN CONTROL...OR THIS PLACE IS MORE IN CONTROL OF HIM...
EITHER WAY, IT'S HIS TERRITORY. LAST TIME ME AND BIG GREEN WERE HERE, WE BARELY GOT OUT.
HE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE THE SAM STERNS I USEDTA KNOW, EITHER. MORE LIKE...
HULK IS SCARED.
...WELL.
MORE LIKE THAT.
...
HOW DO YOU FIGHT SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
NO IDEA. WALK UP AND START HITTING IT, I GUESS.
BUT I GOTTA TELL YA...

...I DON'T MUCH LIKE OUR *ODDS.*

ABOVE.
INFINITY TO ONE.
THOSE ARE THE PROBABILITIES WE'RE DEALING WITH, I'M AFRAID.
DON'T GIVE ME THAT, REED. YOU'RE REALLY SAYING HULK AND JACKIE COULD JUST WALK THROUGH THE FOREVER GATE AND WE CAN'T?
THERE'S A CIVILIAN MIXED UP IN THIS NOW, STRETCH--
YOU'RE PREACHING TO THE CHOIR, BOTH OF YOU.
BUT THIS GAMMA REALM-- THIS BELOW-PLACE-- IT'S LIKE NOWHERE WE'VE EVER USED THIS TECHNOLOGY TO REACH.

THE LOCATION SEEMED TO CHANGE CHAOTICALLY--AS IF BOTH AN INFINITE DISTANCE AWAY AND ALL AROUND US.
I COULD ONLY MAINTAIN THE GATE BY CONTINUOUS EXTRAPOLATION FROM THE HULK'S UNIQUE GAMMA FREQUENCY...
...BUT WITH THE HULK NOW GONE, WE'VE LOST THE MAP. THE ONLY WAY TO FIND THE BELOW-PLACE AGAIN WOULD BE RANDOM CHANCE.
INFINITY TO ONE.
REED-- YOU CAN'T JUST GIVE UP--
"I DON'T PLAN TO, SUE. BUT IF THERE'S ANY FIELD OF SCIENCE THAT ISN'T MY SPECIALTY, IT'S EXOTIC GAMMA.
"I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE WHO CAN TRULY GRASP IT OUTSIDE OF BRUCE BANNER HIMSELF...
HOLLAND TUNNEL
"...AND MAYBE ONE OR TWO OTHERS."
IN FACT, SOMETIMES I WONDER IF YOU COULD CALL IT SCIENCE AT ALL.
OR IF IT'S SOMETHING ELSE.

LIKE SOME HEATHEN RITUAL...
IT'S QUITE SIMPLE, ROBERT.
I FOCUS THE RADIUM ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATE WHILE SCREENING OUT ALPHA AND BETA PARTICLES--BUT NOT, I HOPE, OUR "GAMMA."
THE RADIATION WILL CAST AN IMAGE UPON THE PLATE--ONE THAT I HOPE PROVES CERTAIN THEORIES OF MINE.
IT'S VERY SIMILAR TO THE APPLICATION OF RÖNTGEN'S FAMOUS X-RAYS.
AH, THERE'S A WONDER, ROBERT!
I'M TOLD YOU CAN SEE RIGHT THROUGH A MAN...
...
SAMUEL?
BEATRICE SENDS HER WARMEST REGARDS.

DOES SHE? THAT'S, AH... THAT'S VERY GOOD OF HER.
YOU MUST THANK HER FOR ME.
I SUPPOSE I MUST.
THOUGH I WOULD THINK THAT IF I AM CONVEYING THEM, HER REGARDS CANNOT BE SO WARM...
...NEXT TO THE REGARDS SHE GAVE YOU SO WARMLY IN PERSON, THIS PAST NOVEMBER.
YES, SAMUEL. I CAN SEE THROUGH A MAN.
EVEN WHEN HE THINKS ME BLIND.
...
ROBERT, YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND--
KRAKK

MR. GOOM
HHNNH!
YOU'RE SURE THIS IS A GOOD IDEA?
KNOCKING ON THE LEADER'S DOOR?
IT AIN'T LIKE HE'S ANSWERING, McGEE.
THEN AGAIN, MAYBE HE CAN'T HEAR IT. I'M NOT EXACTLY MAKING HEADWAY.
WHATEVER THIS IS MADE OF, IT'S STRONGER THAN I AM...
LET HULK TRY.
KNOCK YOURSELF OUT.
I DON'T THINK HE EVEN KNOWS WE'RE OUT HERE. THIS THING...IT AIN'T HIM, EXACTLY. IT'S LIKE A SHELL. A COCOON.
HE'S SQUIRRELED AWAY IN THERE, FEEDING OFF BANNER...AND WHILE HE'S DOING THAT, WE'RE JUST PART OF HIS BIG GAMMA CIRCUIT...

...PART OF HIS PLAN.
WHUDD
HE MADE THIS BIG SPEECH--HE WAS GONNA TURN US INTO MINDLESS HUSKS.
THEN WE'D SPREAD DESTRUCTION, LEAK OUT RAGE, YADA YADA...
...AND THAT'D MAKE HIM STRONGER.
WHUDD
SO I BUST OUT. THEN WHAT HAPPENS?
I BREAK A TON OF STUFF AND PISS EVERYBODY OFF.
JUST BY STANDING THERE.
WHUDD
HILARIOUS, RIGHT?
STERNS DIDN'T NEED TO TURN US INTO HUSKS--WE'RE ALREADY HULKS.

WE'RE ALREADY MONSTERS.
WHAMM
LOOK AT THE HOLD I HAVE ON YOU.
SHUT UP.
HERE IS YOUR REWARD.
WHAMM
"I LOVE YOU."
YOU STUPID
STUPID
SHUT UP!
CHILD.

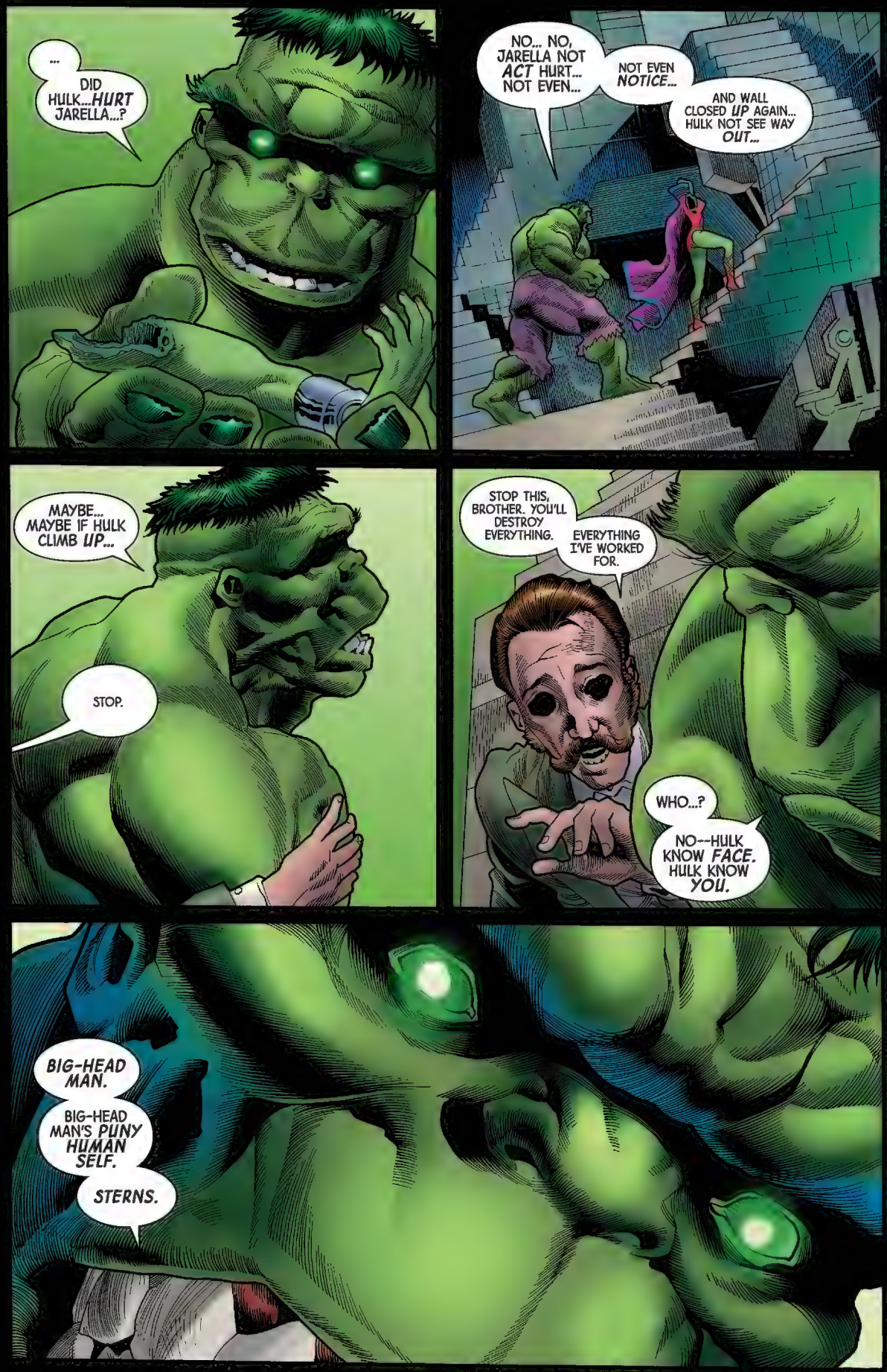
RRAIRGH!
HULK NOT!
HULK NOT STUPID!
KRUSH
WELL, HOLY CRAP.
HULK JUST WANTED DADDY.
JUST WANTED DADDY TO LOVE HULK.
OH LORD, YOUR HAND... IS THAT GOING TO HEAL DOWN HERE, OR--?
HULK... HULK NOT STUPID.
HULK NOT...

...NOT MONSTER.
I DON'T KNOW WHY THERE'S A HULK.
HULK... I...
I KNEW YOU WERE A MONSTER.
BUT.
I'VE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO.

DADDY...?
NO ONE ELSE TO TURN TO.
PLEASE.
HELP ME.
IT'S NOT BRIAN, KID. IT'S A TRAP.
JUST STAY CALM--
NO!
HULK SICK OF STAYING CALM! SICK OF BEING HURT!
HULK HAS HAD ENOUGH!
AND NOW, HULK WILL--
...HULK WILL SMASH...?

BELOVED.

I WAS NOT A PART OF YOUR WORLD.
DEAD FRIENDS...AND... JARELLA...?
JARELLA, IT IS HULK!
BE KIND TO YOURSELF.
JARELLA, STOP--HULK HURTS, HULK NOT FEEL RIGHT INSIDE--
JARELLA, LOOK AT HULK!
PLEASE, JARELLA--DO NOT LEAVE HULK ALONE--
--AGAIN--


...
DID HULK...HURT JARELLA...?
NO... NO, JARELLA NOT ACT HURT... NOT EVEN...
NOT EVEN NOTICE...
AND WALL CLOSED UP AGAIN... HULK NOT SEE WAY OUT...
MAYBE... MAYBE IF HULK CLIMB UP...
STOP.
STOP THIS, BROTHER. YOU'LL DESTROY EVERYTHING.
EVERYTHING I'VE WORKED FOR.
WHO...?
NO--HULK KNOW FACE. HULK KNOW YOU.
BIG-HEAD MAN.
BIG-HEAD MAN'S PUNY HUMAN SELF.
STERNS.

ROBERT.
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND.
HULK UNDERSTAND! HULK UNDERSTAND THAT STERNS DID THIS! ALL OF THIS!
STERNS HURT HULK--HURT WHOLE WORLD-- AND FOR THAT--
--HULK WILL SMASH!
AND THEN-- HULK WILL CLIMB! FIND JARELLA! BRING JARELLA BACK TO HULK!
BRING EVERYONE BACK TO HULK!
STOP.
STOP.

STOP!
STOP THIS, BROTHER! THE EQUIPMENT--
YOU'LL DESTROY EVERYTHING!
EVERYTHING I'VE WORKED FOR--
HRRKK!

OH? AM I ON THE VERGE OF SMASHING YOUR PRETTY WORLD, SAMUEL?
DESTROYING THE THING YOU LOVE? ALL YOUR HARD WORK?
ROBERT-- PLEASE--
THAT SAMPLE →KAFF← IS PRECIOUS--
I HAD SOMETHING PRECIOUS TOO.
A SPARK OF JOY, IN A WORLD THAT HAD BROUGHT ONLY PAIN.
SOMETHING BRIGHT AND GLOWING, THAT WAS MINE.
HAPPINESS, SAMUEL. FOR ME...THAT WAS WORK.
THE HARDEST WORK.
ROBERT, FOR GOD'S SAKE--I BEG YOU--

TELL ME WHY. WHY YOU BROKE THE WORLD I WAS HAPPY IN.
WHAT WAS THE REASON?
TELL ME.
TELL ME WHY!
I--WE NEVER MEANT TO HURT ANYONE.
BUT--BUT ANNE WAS GONE. MY HEART WAS BROKEN, AND...
I WAS ALONE, ROBERT.
I WAS ALONE...
...AND SO WAS SHE.
SHE--SHE TOLD ME HOW COLD YOU ALWAYS WERE. NEVER SHOWING FEELING. HOW... HOW YOU WERE EMPTY, ROBERT.
EMPTY AS THE WRECK OF A--

HRRKK--
OPEN.
OPEN!
KKAAH--
YOU-- YOUR GREAT WORK--
GLGGK--
HHRK!
HLLGKK--
HK

...
WHO IS EMPTY NOW, SAMUEL?
NOT I.

NOT I.

WELCOME TO THE BAXTER BUILDING!
THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE FOR CONSULTATION DUE TO A PRIOR EMERGENCY.
MAY I TAKE A MESSAGE, MISTER...?
IT'S DOCTOR...
...DOCTOR WALT LANGKOWSKI.
I'M THE OLDEST FRIEND BRUCE BANNER HAS. I WAS THERE AT THE START.
I THINK THEY'RE GONNA WANT TO LET ME IN.

HHRRAAAHH!
FINALLY!
GUESS THE MADDER AT MAGIC REBUILDING WALLS I GET, THE STRONGER I GET...
YOU'RE SURE THAT WAS YOU?
FOR ALL WE KNOW, THE TRAP'S JUST OPENING FOR THE NEXT VICTIMS.
DON'T HURT MY FEELINGS. BEING ABLE TO BREAK STUFF IS IMPORTANT TO ME.
SO DO WE HEAD UP, OR...?
JOE.
AFTER MIGHTY JOE YOUNG.
ONE OF MY FAVORITE BIG GORILLAS.

UNTIL YOU CAME ALONG.
...
MIKE...
YOU KNOW HIM...?
MIKE BERENGETTI.
HE WAS A CASINO BOSS IN VEGAS--
I'VE ALWAYS PREFERRED LAS VEGAS, SIR.
HEH. SORRY, MIKE.
WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN.
THE THINGS HERE... YOU KNOW THEY'RE JUST ECHOES OF THE DEAD...
I KNOW, I KNOW. GIMME SOME CREDIT, MCGEE.
BUT...HE LIKED TO REMIND PEOPLE. LAS VEGAS-- ALWAYS.
KINDA NICE TO BE REMINDED AGAIN.

I HATE THESE CHEAP, OUT-OF-TOWN HOTELS.
NOT STOPPING, HUH, MIKE?
WELL, GOOD LUCK AT THE TABLES.
WHO WAS HE TO YOU?
MIKE WAS MY BOSS, BACK IN THE DAY. HE GAVE ME MY NAME. "JOE FIXIT."
THAT'S WHY I STILL USE THAT NAME--EVEN THOUGH WHO I AM IS THE HULK. 'CAUSE IT WAS HIS GIFT TO ME.
THE FIRST GUY I EVER MET WHO ACTUALLY GAVE A DAMN. WHO CARED IF I GOT BETTER OR GOT WORSE...
ANYWAY. IF I MET MIKE, GREENIE MET SOMEONE HE CARED ABOUT. AND GREENIE'S DUMB ENOUGH TO CLIMB THESE STAIRS AFTER 'EM.
AND I GUESS I'M THAT DUMB TOO...
...'CAUSE I CARE ABOUT HIM.
COME ON IF YOU'RE COMING, McGEE.
... MIKE BERENGETTI SOUNDS LIKE A FATHER FIGURE.
NOTHIN' FIGURATIVE ABOUT IT.
NOT TO ME.

SO WHAT HAPPENED?
TOO MANY FIGHTS. TOO MUCH DAMAGE. NOT ALL MY FAULT, BUT...I WAS NEVER EXACTLY DELICATE.
SO HE SENT ME AWAY, AND AWAY I WENT.
THING IS-- MIKE HAD ENEMIES, ALL WAITIN' FOR THEIR MOMENT. I'D JUST WEEDED OUT THE NICE ONES.
"SO WHEN I LEFT-- WHEN I LEFT HIM VULNERABLE...
"...WELL.
"IT'S LAS VEGAS."
...
YOU'RE SAYING HE DIED BECAUSE YOU WALKED IN AND BROKE EVERYTHING.
SO THAT WASN'T JUST MY FATHER.
...
JUST BE READY, McGEE--

--WE'RE ALMOST AT THE *TOP*...

...FLOOR...

HELP.

HELP HULK.

HELP HULK.
PLUP
SHLKK
SSSORRY.
SHLOKK
JUST GROWING SOMETHING TO SPEAK THROUGH.
THE BIG MOUTH UP THERE IS ONLY FOR FEEDING.
FEEDING ON PREY.
WHOOM!

HELP HULK.
STAY BEHIND ME, McGEE.
STERNS-- LET HIM GO, YOU SICK--
AH-AH-AH.
YOU COMPLETED MY GAMMA CIRCUIT, HULK. YOU GAVE ME THIS POWER. YOU CAN'T COMPLAIN NOW.
YOU CAN'T GET AWAY, EITHER. THE GREEN DOORS ARE CLOSED AND LOCKED.
NOW, BEAT HIM DOWN, SLAVE.
AND FEED HIM TO ME.
KID-- STAY BACK--
WHROK
HELP.

WHAM
HELP HULK.
HE WAS THE STRONGEST OF YOU. HE CHALLENGED ME. NOT LIKE YOU, "JOE FIXIT."
GREY, RED, PINK, PINSTRIPE OR PATTERNED SHIRT—I COULD ALWAYS MANIPULATE YOU...
I'M GONNA MANIPULATE YOU, STERNS.
INTO A BALLOON ANIMAL.
YOU SHOULDN'A MADE ME--
DO TELL.
KRAKK

HULK--
NO! DON'T GET IN REACH!
JUST GET OUTTA HERE!
YOU'RE STILL-- UNNH!--STILL HUMAN!
THE GAMMA'S JUST IN--HNNH!-- IN YER EYES! YOUR GAMMA POWER IS LOOKING!
YOU BEEN SCARED, YOU BEEN PISSED OFF--IF YOU COULD HULK OUT, YOU WOULDA BY NOW! YOU AIN'T GONNA!
YOU GOTTA GO!
AAARRGHH!
THERE'S NOWHERE TO GO! AND I CAN'T JUST LEAVE YOU.
THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMETHING I CAN--
OH.
LOOK.

JUST LOOK.
"LOOK HIM IN THE EYE." I KNOW. I REMEMBER FROM THE LAST TIME.
DAD-- WHATEVER YOU ARE--I JUST...
...I JUST CAN'T, OKAY?
WE'RE GOING TO DIE HERE. I CAN'T.
I CAN'T DIE TALKING TO GHOSTS.
THERE'S A PLAN.
IS THERE?
REALLY?
SO WHAT--WHAT IS THE PLAN, DAD? COME ON! TELL ME!
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO BE LOOKING AT?
YOU.
LOOK AT YOU.

DAD, YOU SHOULD REST-- THIS IS YOUR SECOND HEART ATTACK--
QUIET NOW. LEMME GET THROUGH THIS.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE PLAN IS FOR US. BUT YOU'RE ALL THE PLAN I EVER NEEDED.
AND...LISTEN, YOU'RE MY BABY GIRL. I'D HAVE BEEN PROUD OF YOU WHATEVER YOU DID.
BUT JUST LOOK AT YOU. A JOURNALISM SCHOLARSHIP. ASKING THE QUESTIONS.
LOOK WHO YOU ARE. I'M SO DAMN PROUD, JACKIE.
I'M SO DAMN PROUD.
I...
IT'S NOT ANGER, IS IT, DAD?
I'VE BEEN ANGRY. I'VE BEEN SCARED.
I'VE BEEN REACTING.
ACTING LIKE WHO I AM WAS LOST IN ALL THIS.
BUT I'M STILL ME. I'M JACQUELINE McGEE. I'M AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER.
I LOOK INTO THINGS.

EEEEEEE!!

SKRA-KROOM

HULK-- HULK IS FREE--
AND HULK WILL SMASH LEADER--
HOLD IT.
SMASHING AIN'T GONNA DO IT. HE'S TOO BIG.
BUT I FIGURE THIS CRAP GOES RIGHT INTO HIS GIANT BRAIN--
HA! YES!
--AND I FIGURE WE'RE STRONG ENOUGH TO PULL IT INSIDE OUT.
HA HA HA! YES!
NO MORE HURT HULK! IS BIG-HEAD LEADER'S TURN TO HURT!
BECAUSE LEADER NOT FACE HULK NOW--HE FACE HULKS!
AND TOGETHER--
--HULKS ARE STRONGEST THERE IS!
YOU SAID IT, KID.
GET READY--

--AND HEAVE!
HHRKK
HHUUCHH
SHKLUTCH
OKAY. WHEN I SAID HEAVE, I DIDN'T MEAN HIM.
WHAT'S HE SPIT UP...?
...
HULK THINK HULK KNOW.
WHAT WAS ALWAYS INSIDE BIG-HEAD MAN?
SPLECH
LITTLE-HEAD MAN.
B-BUH.
BRUCE.
YOU GUH-GOTTA HELP ME.

LEADER'S PUNY HUMAN SELF...
UNLESS IT'S A TRICK. McGEE? YOU WANNA PUT THE EYES ON HIM?
...
THERE'S NOTHING TO SEE. HIS GAMMA'S GONE.
YEAH. I-I'M NOTHING. NOTHING. JUST...JUST A GUY. JUST SAM FROM THE PLANT... THAT'S ALL...
I...I SAW A GREEN DOOR AND I--I WANTED TO KNOW, BUT THE--THE THINGS I KNEW...
I DON'T WANNA! I DON'T WANNA KNOW ANYMORE!
GET IT OUTTA MY HEAD!
PFFT. PUNY HUMAN.
HULK GET BANNER OUT NOW...BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE...
RRUMMMBLLLE
I DON'T WANNA KNOW. I DON'T WANNA KNOW ABOUT HIM.
DON'T WANNA KNOW HE'S COMING...
DON'T WANNA KNOW HE'S HERE.

THIS AIN'T GOOD. THIS WHOLE PLACE IS STARTIN' TO FALL APART.
MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T HAVE POPPED THE LEADER LIKE A ZIT--HE WAS ALL THAT WAS HOLDING THIS PLACE TOGETHER--
WE MIGHT HAVE BIGGER FISH, JOE.
HE'S HERE.
THE ONE WHO TURNED ME INTO THIS...THE...THE ONE BELOW ALL...
GOOD!
YEAH. I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR MY SHOT AT THIS PUNK.
MAYBE STERNS NOT WANT TO KNOW--
--BUT HULK WANT TO KNOW!
HULK WANT TO KNOW WHY!

WHY?

WHY WAS HULK *HURT* SO MUCH? WHY IS HULK *BROKEN INSIDE?* WHY ALWAYS *AFRAID?* ALWAYS IN *PAIN?*

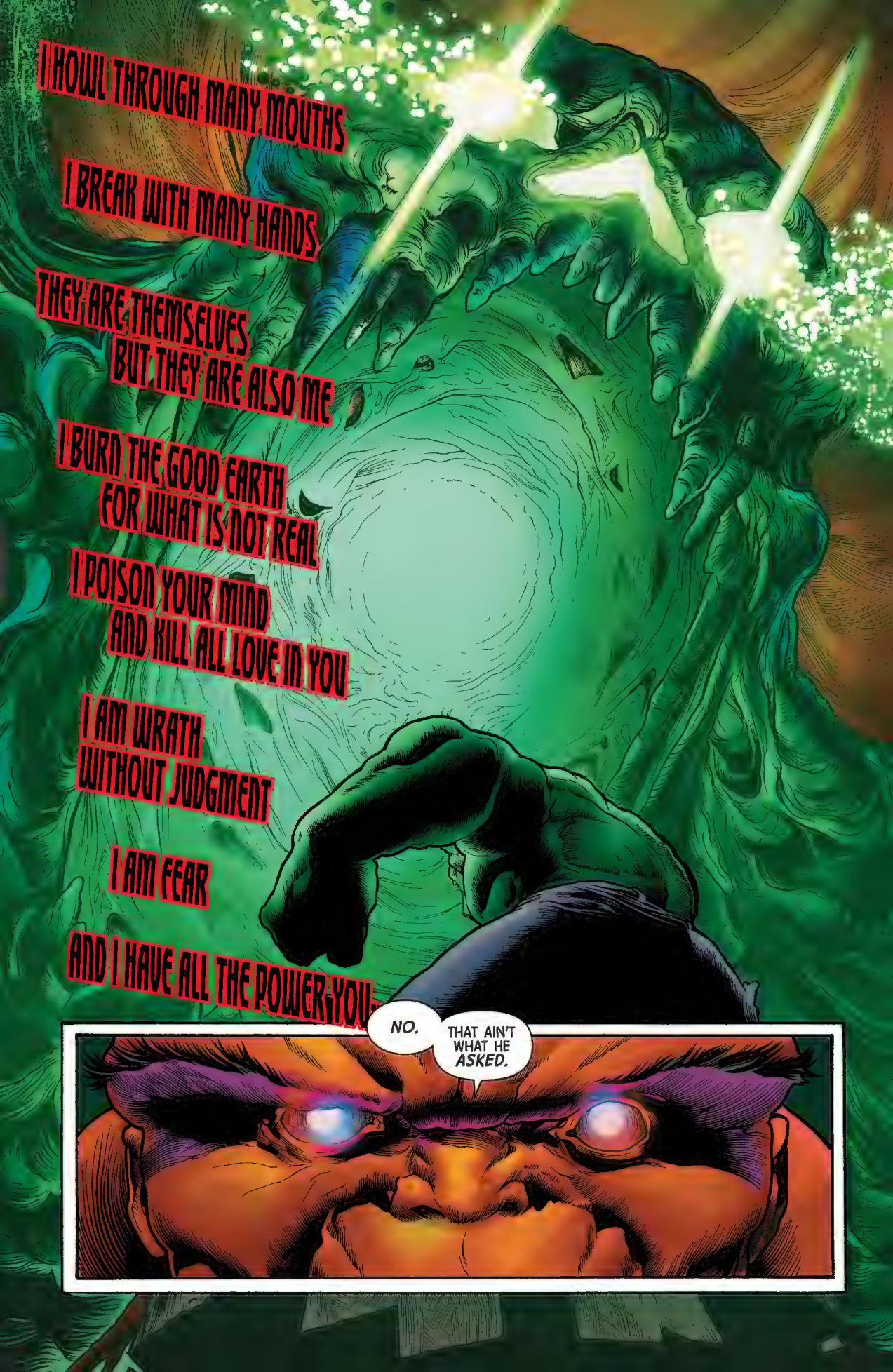
AND WHY HULK HURT *FRIENDS?* WHY DO FRIENDS HAVE TO *SUFFER* FOR HULK?

*WHY HULK HAVE TO BE HULK AT ALL?*

*TELL HULK! HULK WANT TO KNOW!*

*WHY?*

**WHY?**


I HOWL THROUGH MANY MOUTHS
I BREAK WITH MANY HANDS
THEY ARE THEMSELVES
BUT THEY ARE ALSO ME
I BURN THE GOOD EARTH
FOR WHAT IS NOT REAL
I POISON YOUR MIND
AND KILL ALL LOVE IN YOU
I AM WRATH
WITHOUT JUDGMENT
I AM FEAR
AND I HAVE ALL THE POWER YOU
NO.
THAT AIN'T WHAT HE ASKED.

YES! HULK HAS HEARD THIS! BIG TALK FROM BIG BAD THING--BUT NO WHY!
AND WE ALL WANNA KNOW WHY. WHY, YOU GET IT?
BECAUSE WE DON'T NEED TO KNOW WHO.
WE ALREADY KNOW WHO. WHAT, YOU THINK YOU'RE HIDING IT?
YOU THINK WE DON'T KNOW WHOSE HULK YOU ARE?
COME ON! SHOW ME YOUR OTHER FACE, YOU PIECE OF CRAP!
SHOW ME YOUR REAL FACE!

SHOW YOUR FACE SO I CAN LOOK YOU IN THE EYE!

VERY WELL.

I AM THE ONE ABOVE ALL.

LOOK UPON ME.
HULK IS AFRAID.
HULK IS AFRAID...
WHAT... WHAT AM I LOOKING AT?
SHE... SHE'S GOT MY MOM'S FACE...
...
NOW ANSWER THE QUESTION.

BECAUSE YOU ARE MY CHILD.

...
NO.
NO, SEE... MIKE BERENGETTI WAS MY FATHER.
YOU...
...YOU'RE JÜST A GUY WHO KNOCKED ME AROUND.
YOU ARE MY CREATION. YOU ARE NECESSARY.
THERE IS LIGHT AND THERE IS COUNTERWEIGHT.
WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I LAID THESE FOUNDATIONS?
DECLARE, IF YOU HAVE UNDERSTANDING.
SCREW YOU.
IT AIN'T RIGHT.

IT AIN'T JUST.
YOU WANNA TORTURE ME? I CAN TAKE IT.
YOU THINK-- NNFF!--YOU THINK I CAN'T TAKE IT?
WE CAN ALL TAKE IT.
SHRIP
WE GOTTA TAKE IT, RIGHT?
WHATEVER WE GET. FROM YOU, FROM EACH OTHER.
BUT I SAY WE DESERVE TO KNOW WHY.
THERE'S A PLAN? THERE'S A REASON?
TELL ME WHAT IT IS. TELL ME WHY ALL OF THIS. TELL ME WHY WE HURT.
TELL ME WHY THERE'S A HULK.

WHY ARE YOU AS YOU ARE?
THAT'S WHAT I'M ASKIN' YOU!
TELL ME, OR SO HELP ME--
NO I ASK OF YOU
WHAT IS THE HULK?
WHAT HAVE YOU BECOME?
HULK... HULK NOT KNOW.
HULK NOT KNOW...

AND WHAT OF *ONESELF*?

WHAT OF *MERCY*?

GET OUT!
OUT OF MY HOUSE, ADULTERESS!
OUT FROM MY DOOR!
ROBERT-- ROBERT, PLEASE-- THIS WEATHER, THIS UNGODLY COLD--
I SHALL FREEZE TO DEATH OUT HERE--WE BOTH SHALL--
AND THE FIRES BELOW WILL GIVE YOU ALL THE WARMTH YOU DESERVE!
IN THE NAME OF GOD, ROBERT. HAVE MERCY.
I'M CARRYING YOUR CHILD--
BUT IT IS SURELY NOT MY CHILD, BEATRICE. AND NEVER WAS.
AS YOU ARE NONE OF MINE.

I'M YOUR WIFE--
A GRIEVOUS ERROR THAT I HAVE ENDED.
YOU AND MY BROTHER HAVE SOILED MY GOOD NAME---THUS, I DENY IT TO YOU.
AND TO YOUR BASTARD CHILD.
LET THE LITTLE MONSTER TAKE YOUR NAME, BEATRICE. LET IT SIRE A DYNASTY OF DAMNED THINGS LIKE IT.
I CARE NOT.
YOU-- SAMUEL WAS RIGHT ABOUT YOU! YOU'RE NOT SIMPLY COLD, YOU'RE CRUEL!
YOU'RE THE MONSTER! YOU! AND YOU ALWAYS WERE!
YOU'RE THE MONSTER, ROBERT STERNS!
SAVE YOUR HISTRIONICS-- FOR I AM STRENGTHENED AGAINST THEM.
THE LORD HAS MADE ME THE STRONGEST THERE IS.
BEGONE FROM MY DOOR, BEATRICE BANNER.

WHAT WILL YOU BECOME?

FOR THE LEFT HAND IS STRENGTH.

HEY, I TRIED TO GET ANSWERS, McGEE.
BUT FROM THE ANSWERS I GOT...LOOK, I AIN'T KNOWN FOR MY SMARTS, OKAY? AND YOU HEARD ALL THAT STUFF AS CLEAR AS I DID.
BUT I DON'T THINK IT CAN END. NOT THE BIG PICTURE, Y'KNOW?
ALL I KNOW IS THAT WE'RE DONE WITH IT--
NO.
NOT YET.
...HUH?
WHAT'S UP WITH YOU?
HULK...HULK IS THINKING.
TRYING TO UNDERSTAND.
STERNS?
LEMME ALONE.
I CAUSED THIS. 'CAUSE I HAD TO GET SMART. I HAD TO KNOW.
I... I KILLED PEOPLE. MY OWN BROTHER. I DAMNED MYSELF.
JUST LEMME ALONE, OKAY?
JUST LEMME DIE HERE.

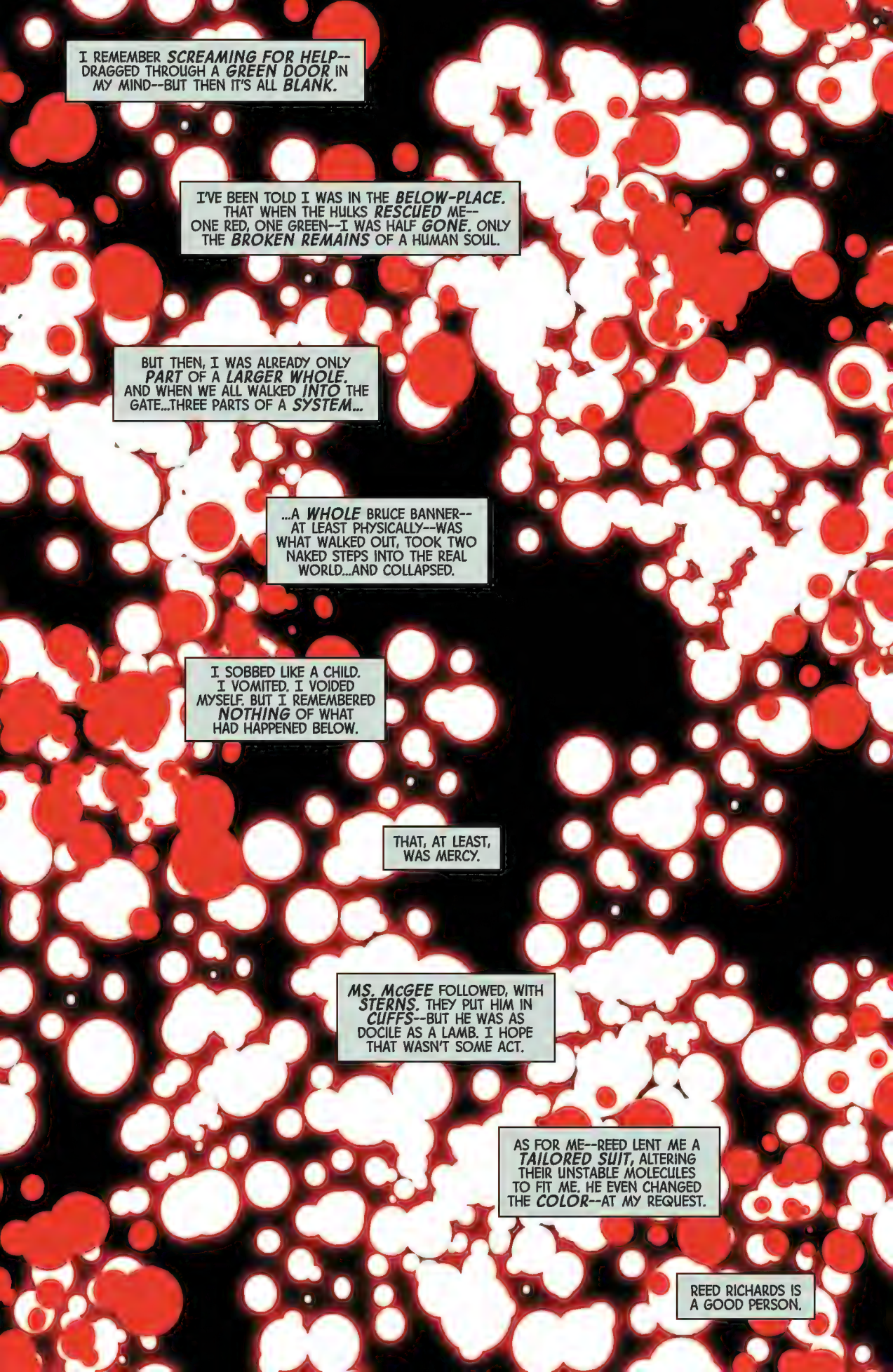
...
YOU HURT HULK.
HURT HULK A LOT.
BUT IF HULK LEFT YOU HERE... LEFT ANYONE HERE... IT WOULD HURT HULK WORSE.
HURT HULK INSIDE. HURT... WHO HULK IS.
SO.
HULK FORGIVE YOU.
YOU... YOU ARE HULK TOO.
SAME AS HULK.
HULKS SHOULD FORGIVE HULKS.
SOMEONE HAS TO.

BUT THE RIGHT HAND IS MERCY.

...
ARE WE *SURE* THIS IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO?
NOPE. BUT I MEANT IT WHEN I SAID WE WERE *DONE.*
*BRIAN BANNER* WAS WHO BELOW-GUY STARTED OUT WITH. THE FIRST GUY DOWN HERE--THE FIRST *HOST,* OR *MASK,* OR WHATEVER.
BUT THEN STERNS GOT *RID* OF BRIAN.
AND NOW *WE'RE* GETTING RID OF *STERNS.*
AND IF THE GREEN DOORS REALLY *ARE* LOCKED TIGHT, LIKE HE *SAID...*
...MAYBE IT *IS* OVER. BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT I *MEANT.*
I MEANT *FORGIVING* HIM. AFTER *EVERYTHING.*
I MEAN, I'M SURE HE'LL FEEL TERRIBLE UNTIL HE *DOESN'T.* BUT...OF ALL PEOPLE.
HOW COME *SAM STERNS* GETS FORGIVENESS?

ASK THE KID.
HE CAN FORGIVE WHAT WAS DONE TO HIM. THAT'S HIS LOOKOUT.
BUT ME? I'M A JUDGMENTAL KINDA GUY. I DON'T FORGIVE SO EASY.
LET'S SEE WHAT STERNS DOES TO EARN ANY KINDA...
...
AW, HELL.
LISTEN. WHILE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THIS STUFF.
THE SYSTEM I'M IN...WE SMASHED YOUR LIFE. WHAT WE TOOK FROM YOU, IT CAN'T BE PAID BACK.
I'M A PART OF THAT. AND SORRY AIN'T ENOUGH. SORRY'S JUST A WORD, IT DON'T DO ANYTHING.
HULK--
THIS AIN'T ME WANTING FORGIVENESS.
THIS AIN'T ABOUT WHAT I WANT.
BUT WHATEVER YOU WANT OR NEED FROM ME...
ANY TIME, ANY PLACE, ANY FAVOR. FOREVER.
FIND BANNER. SAY THE WORD.
I'LL COME RUNNIN'.

...
OKAY, SUNSHINE JOE.
I'LL LET YOU KNOW.
HEY!
ROCK MAN...?
NICE VACATION SPOT YA GOT HERE! SO THIS IS HELL, HUH? GUESS NOW I COLLECTED THE SET.
YOU FOLKS WANT A LIFT HOME, OR WHAT?


I REMEMBER SCREAMING FOR HELP--DRAGGED THROUGH A GREEN DOOR IN MY MIND--BUT THEN IT'S ALL BLANK.
I'VE BEEN TOLD I WAS IN THE BELOW-PLACE. THAT WHEN THE HULKS RESCUED ME--ONE RED, ONE GREEN--I WAS HALF GONE. ONLY THE BROKEN REMAINS OF A HUMAN SOUL.
BUT THEN, I WAS ALREADY ONLY PART OF A LARGER WHOLE. AND WHEN WE ALL WALKED INTO THE GATE...THREE PARTS OF A SYSTEM...
...A WHOLE BRUCE BANNER--AT LEAST PHYSICALLY--WAS WHAT WALKED OUT, TOOK TWO NAKED STEPS INTO THE REAL WORLD...AND COLLAPSED.
I SOBBED LIKE A CHILD. I VOMITED. I VOIDED MYSELF. BUT I REMEMBERED NOTHING OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED BELOW.
THAT, AT LEAST, WAS MERCY.
MS. MCGEE FOLLOWED, WITH STERNS. THEY PUT HIM IN CUFFS--BUT HE WAS AS DOCILE AS A LAMB. I HOPE THAT WASN'T SOME ACT.
AS FOR ME--REED LENT ME A TAILORED SUIT, ALTERING THEIR UNSTABLE MOLECULES TO FIT ME. HE EVEN CHANGED THE COLOR--AT MY REQUEST.
REED RICHARDS IS A GOOD PERSON.

THEY ALL ARE.
DR. LANGKOWSKI WAS THE KEY TO REOPENING THE FOREVER GATE, OF COURSE--QUITE LITERALLY.
HIS GAMMA SIGNATURE MATCHES BRUCE'S EXACTLY--EVEN IN LEONARD SAMSON'S BODY. WHAT THAT SAYS ABOUT GAMMA IN RELATION TO HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS...
SPEAKIN' OF, STRETCH--CAN YA WHIP UP A FRAMMISTAT TO GET THIS GUY BACK IN HIS OWN BOD, OR WHAT?
WHAT, RIGHT NOW?
YEAH, RIGHT NOW! SHEESH!
ACTUALLY, I THINK THE GAMMA SIGNATURE MIGHT BE THE ANSWER THERE AS WELL. IF BRUCE COULD LEND ME A HAND, WE COULD PROBABLY...
WAIT. WHERE IS BRUCE?
UNOBSERVANT... BUT GOOD PEOPLE.
STERNS--DID YOU SEE HIM LEAVE?
I, UH... NO. SORRY. I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS.
HA! HOW ABOUT THAT.
I DON'T KNOW SOMETHING.
ISN'T THAT GREAT?

I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED IN HELL. BUT I FEEL MORE CONFIDENT, MORE ASSURED--MORE MYSELF.
DID I SOMEHOW ABSORB THE DEVIL ON MY SHOULDER? DID I LAY AN OLD GHOST TO REST? HAVE MY FELLOW ALTERS WORKED OUT SOME DIFFERENCES?
OR IS IT JUST THE FEELING OF A DOOR AS OLD AS GAMMA ITSELF CLOSING...AND A NEW ONE OPENING WIDE?
WHICHEVER IT IS-- I STILL HAVE WORK TO DO. WE HAVE WORK TO DO.
ALL THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN MY MIRROR.
BOTH THE ONES I CAN SEE...
...AND THE ONE I DON'T ALWAYS WANT TO.
SO.
ARE WE GOOD PEOPLE?
WELL?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

*DEFENDERS: THE BEST DEFENSE* VARIANT BY
ARTHUR ADAMS & PAUL MOUNTS

*DEFENDERS: THE BEST DEFENSE* VARIANT BY
VALERIO SCHITI & JASON KEITH

*DEFENDERS: THE BEST DEFENSE* HIDDEN GEM VARIANT BY SAL BUSCEMA & DAVE McCAIG

GAMMA FLIGHT 1

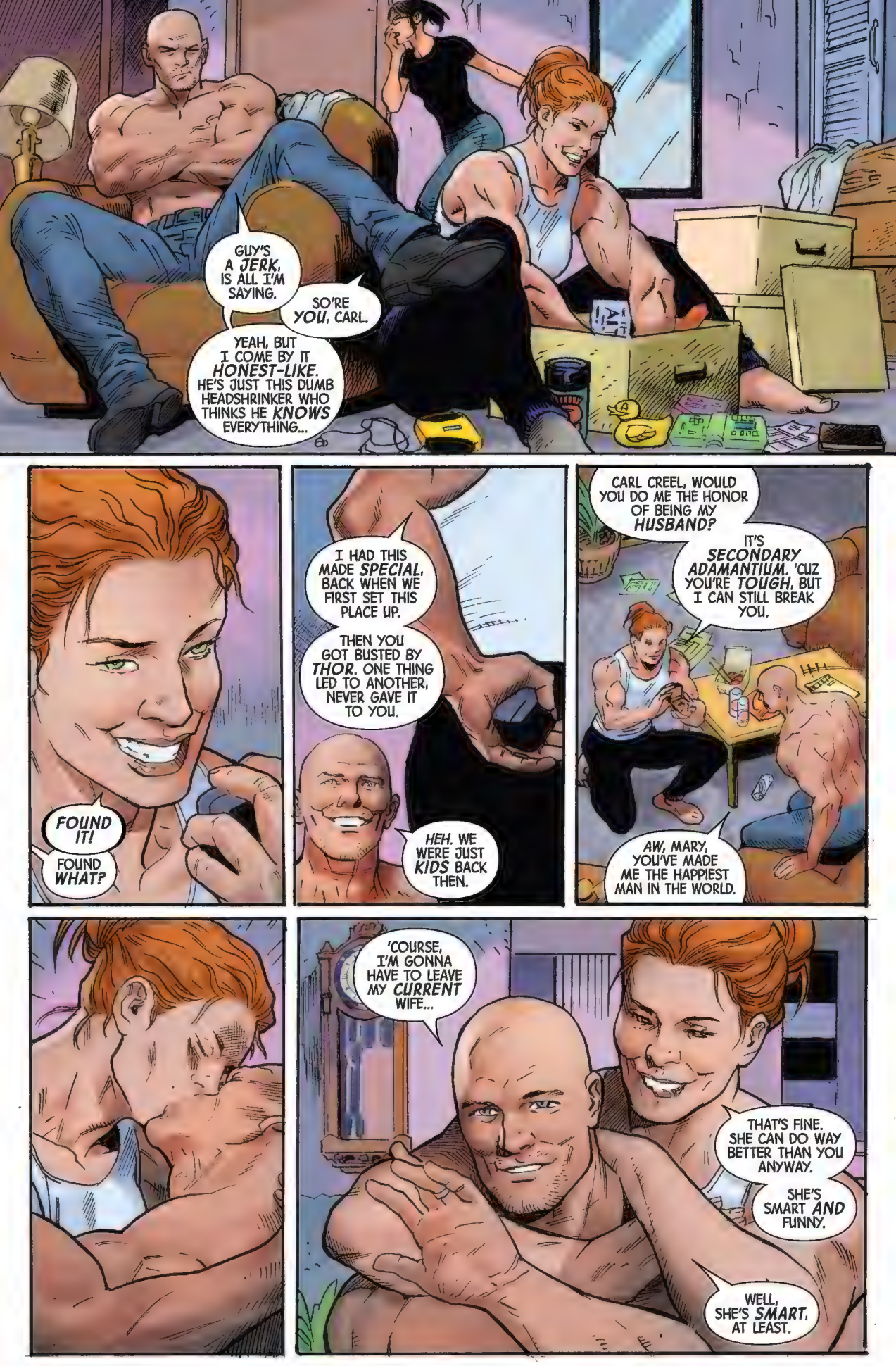
SHADOW BASE REMOTE FACILITY FN34. DECOMMISSIONED.
MY NAME'S CRUSHER CREEL, AND I WAS TRANSFORMED.
BACK IN THE DAY, MY SCUMBAG FATHER TAUGHT ME THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON: THIS WORLD'LL EAT YOU ALIVE UNLESS YOU'RE THE BIGGEST, MEANEST BASTARD IN EYESHOT.
HEY, LEONARD! YOU ALMOST DONE BACK THERE?
LOOKS LIKE IT'S CHECKOUT TIME...
THING IS, THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE BIGGER 'N' MEANER.
AND WHEN I RAN INTO MY MEANER BASTARD--LOKI, NORSE GOD OF BASTARDS--HE REMADE WHO I WAS JUST FOR FUN.
BUT ME? I LIKE POWER...

...AND I LEARNED TO ADAPT.
RAT-ATAT-ATAT-ATAT-ATAT
LEAD. THAT'S ALWAYS FUN.
HRRK!
SOME THINGS ARE CLASSICS FOR A REASON...
CARL! PUT THEM DOWN!
GYRICH SENDS HIS GOONS FOR US, AND YOU WANT ME TO TUCK 'EM IN?
YOU GOT A LOT TO LEARN ABOUT BEING A FUGITIVE, LEN.
IF THEY WERE WITH HENRY GYRICH, THEY'D HAVE BIGGER GUNS!
SO WHAT ABOUT THESE GUNS?
THEY BIG ENOUGH THAT I GET TO FIGHT BACK?
THEY WERE PROBABLY EXPECTING THE HULK!
COME ON!
RAT-ATAT-TAT

CHARLENE! WHAT'S THE STATUS ON THAT TRANSLOCATOR?
CAPACITORS ARE CHARGING. WE SHOULD BE ONLINE.
I WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE STEEL WALLS IN THIS VAULT MAKING AN IDEAL RESONATOR--BUT THE POWER SITUATION'S NOT GREAT. THE SYSTEM'S SLOW.
SOMEWHERE IN NEW MEXICO.
IT'S SAFER TO PULL YOU OUT ONE AT A TIME.
KWOHM
SUNOVA--
YOU'D BETTER TAKE CARL FIRST--
NAH, MAN.
JUST NEED TO CATCH MY BREATH.
YOU SURE?
I'LL LAST A LOT LONGER THAN YOU COULD.
OFF HE GOES. GUESS THE DOC AGREES.
SO...LET'S SEE WHAT WE'VE GOT TO WORK WITH HERE.
DEEP BREATH. PUSH PAST THE METAL, ABSORB THE PURPOSE.
A WAR MACHINE.
I NEED 65 SECONDS TO RECHARGE THE CAPACITORS, CARL--
BAD NEWS FOR YOU, FELLAS. THE BABYSITTER'S GONE.
IT'S GONNA BE A LONG MINUTE...

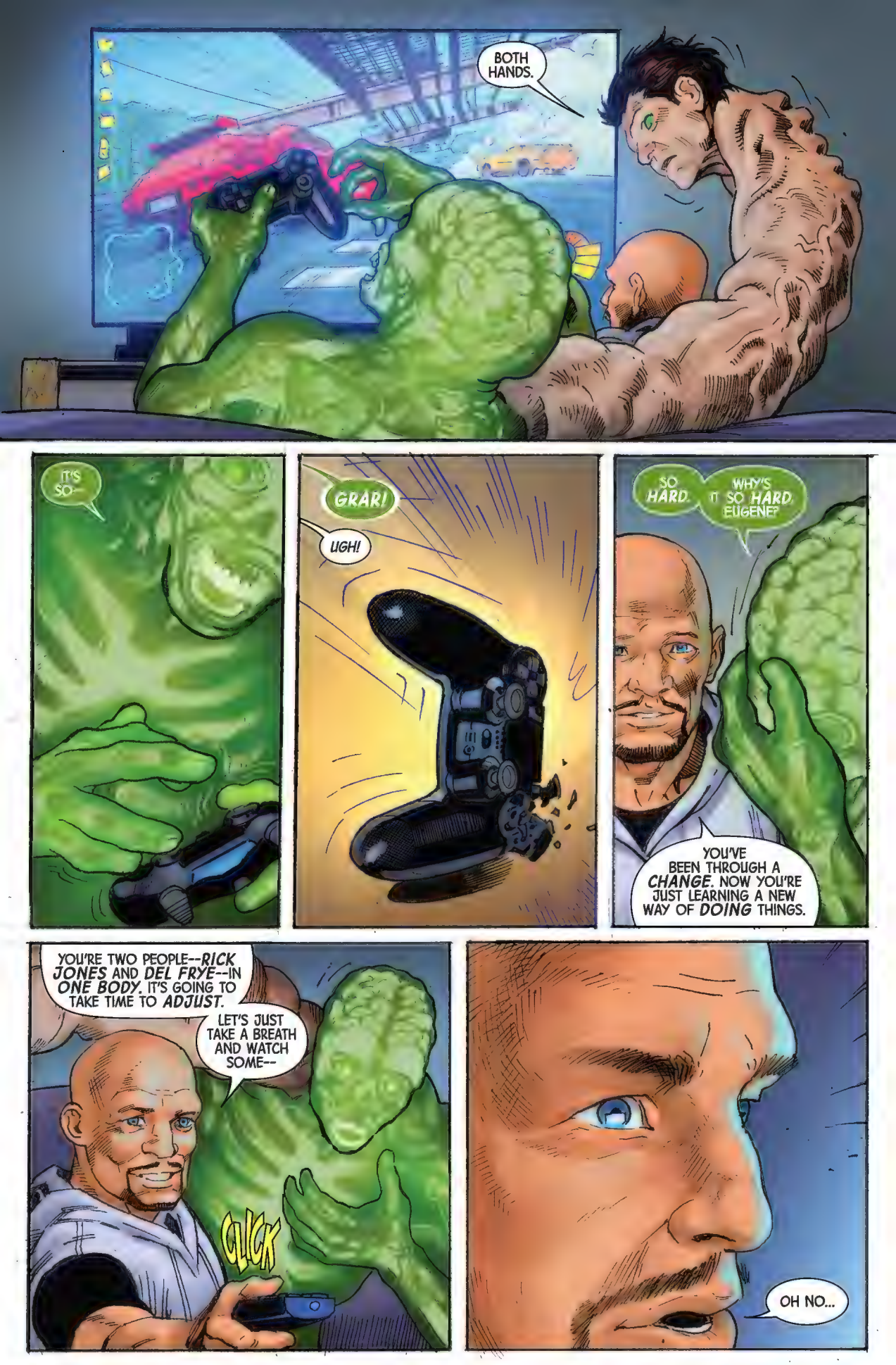
JUST ENOUGH TIME TO PLAY BEFORE SOMEONE BIGGER SHOWS UP.
THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE BIGGER...
WE GOT EVERYTHING ON YOUR SHOPPING LIST, CHARLENE.
BUT I THINK WE CAN MARK THIS PARTICULAR SHADOW BASE SITE AS TOO DANGEROUS FOR A RETURN VISIT...
AGREED. WE'LL NEED TECH FROM SOMEWHERE, THOUGH.
RUNNING ERRANDS? DOES THIS MEAN WE'RE TRANSPORTER-READY AGAIN?
ALMOST, PUCK. WE'RE GOING TO NEED MORE SPACE AND BETTER POWER INFRASTRUCTURE--
WELL, NEXT TIME MARY BUILDS A SECRET HIDEOUT, I'LL MAKE SURE SHE GETS YOUR INPUT, SAMSON.
I AM JUST ABOUT--
NEW HOME, NO SLEEP. WE'RE ALL ON EDGE, EH?
LEN, LET'S TAKE A MOMENT TO APPRECIATE THE HAPPY COUPLE'S KINDNESS IN OPENING THEIR HOME TO US IN OUR HOUR OF NEED...

HE JUST DOESN'T GET IT.
WHEN HE LOSES CONTROL, WE ALL LOOK LIKE MONSTERS.
HEY. I KNOW YOU'RE NOT A MONSTER, LEONARD.
THANK YOU.
OOOOO THAT FEELS GOOD...
I'M JUST NOT USED TO BEING A FUGITIVE.
HIDING FROM GYRICH AND ALPHA FLIGHT. FIGHTING SOLDIERS, LOOTING GOVERNMENT BASES...
I KNOW.
BUT ONCE WE FIGURE OUT HOW TO HELP RICK AND DEL...
AND GET MY OLD BODY BACK.
AND GET YOUR OLD BODY BACK...
THANKS.
I DON'T THINK THE OTHERS GET IT, BUT I KNEW YOU COULD RELATE TO FEELING TRAPPED IN A BODY THAT FEELS SO...
UNNATURAL.
CHARLENE?
JUST BECAUSE MY BODY IS TRANSGENDER...
...DOESN'T MEAN IT'S UNNATURAL!
IT'S NOT THE SAME!
OH.


GUY'S A JERK, IS ALL I'M SAYING.
SO'RE YOU, CARL.
YEAH, BUT I COME BY IT HONEST-LIKE. HE'S JUST THIS DUMB HEADSHRINKER WHO THINKS HE KNOWS EVERYTHING...
FOUND IT!
FOUND WHAT?
I HAD THIS MADE SPECIAL, BACK WHEN WE FIRST SET THIS PLACE UP.
THEN YOU GOT BUSTED BY THOR. ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER, NEVER GAVE IT TO YOU.
HEH. WE WERE JUST KIDS BACK THEN.
CARL CREEL, WOULD YOU DO ME THE HONOR OF BEING MY HUSBAND?
IT'S SECONDARY ADAMANTIUM. 'CUZ YOU'RE TOUGH, BUT I CAN STILL BREAK YOU.
AW, MARY, YOU'VE MADE ME THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD.
'COURSE, I'M GONNA HAVE TO LEAVE MY CURRENT WIFE...
THAT'S FINE. SHE CAN DO WAY BETTER THAN YOU ANYWAY.
SHE'S SMART AND FUNNY.
WELL, SHE'S SMART, AT LEAST.

YOU NEED SOMETHING, EUGENE?
TIME LIKE A TITAN BRIGHT AND STRONG
SPREADS ONE ENCHANTED GLEAM:
EACH HOUR IS BUT A FLUTED SONG,
AND LIFE A LOFTY DREAM.
HUH?
IT'S LAMPMAN. AN OLD FAVORITE.
JUST NICE TO SEE SOMEONE HAPPY, EH?
BURRITO?
YOU GET RICK'S HORCHATA?
IT'S THE ONLY THING HE'S ASKED ABOUT SINCE YOU LEFT.
CHICKEN
GOT IT RIGHT HERE.
HOW'S OUR BOY DOING TODAY?
OUR BOYS? NOT GREAT.
I THINK THEY'RE REALLY STRUGGLING WITH THE MOVE.
EUGENE!
GENE?
WHERE ARE
WE NOW?

WE MOVED IN WITH CARL AND MARY FOR A LITTLE WHILE, REMEMBER? WE NEEDED SOMEWHERE OFF THE GRID.
NO...
I THINK
NO WORRIES, GENTLEMEN. TAKES SOME TIME TO ADJUST TO A NEW PLACE.
GOT YOUR LUNCH...
THANK YOU!
MY GAME WON'T WORK...
WELL, LET'S TAKE A LOOK.
SEEMS LIKE YOU GOT THINGS STARTED, EH? JUST LOST YOUR PLACE.
I DID?
YEAH.
IT DOESN'T
DOESN'T COME TOGETHER.
WHAT DO YOU SAY I GIVE IT A GO WITH YOU GUYS FOR A LITTLE WHILE?
THANK YOU
EUGENE


BOTH HANDS.
IT'S SO--
GRAR!
UGH!
SO HARD.
WHY'S IT SO HARD, EUGENE?
YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH A CHANGE. NOW YOU'RE JUST LEARNING A NEW WAY OF DOING THINGS.
YOU'RE TWO PEOPLE--RICK JONES AND DEL FRYE--IN ONE BODY. IT'S GOING TO TAKE TIME TO ADJUST.
LET'S JUST TAKE A BREATH AND WATCH SOME--
CLICK
OH NO...

HNN

--LOCAL POLICE ARE ISSUING A GAMMA RADIATION WARNING, SUGGESTING THIS CREATURE IS A GAMMA MUTATE.

FOLLOWING INCREASED HULK VIOLENCE IN RECENT MONTHS, AUTHORITIES SUSPECT THE CREATURE MAY BE AN ACCOMPLICE OF DR. BRUCE BANNER, WHO REMAINS AT LARGE.

EEGGOOOOOOO

BANG BANG

LIVE: GAMMA MONSTER ATTACKS AUSTIN

EVERYBODY!

YOU'RE GOING TO WANT TO SEE THIS!

IS THAT THE GLOB?

HE LOOKS LIKE CRAP.

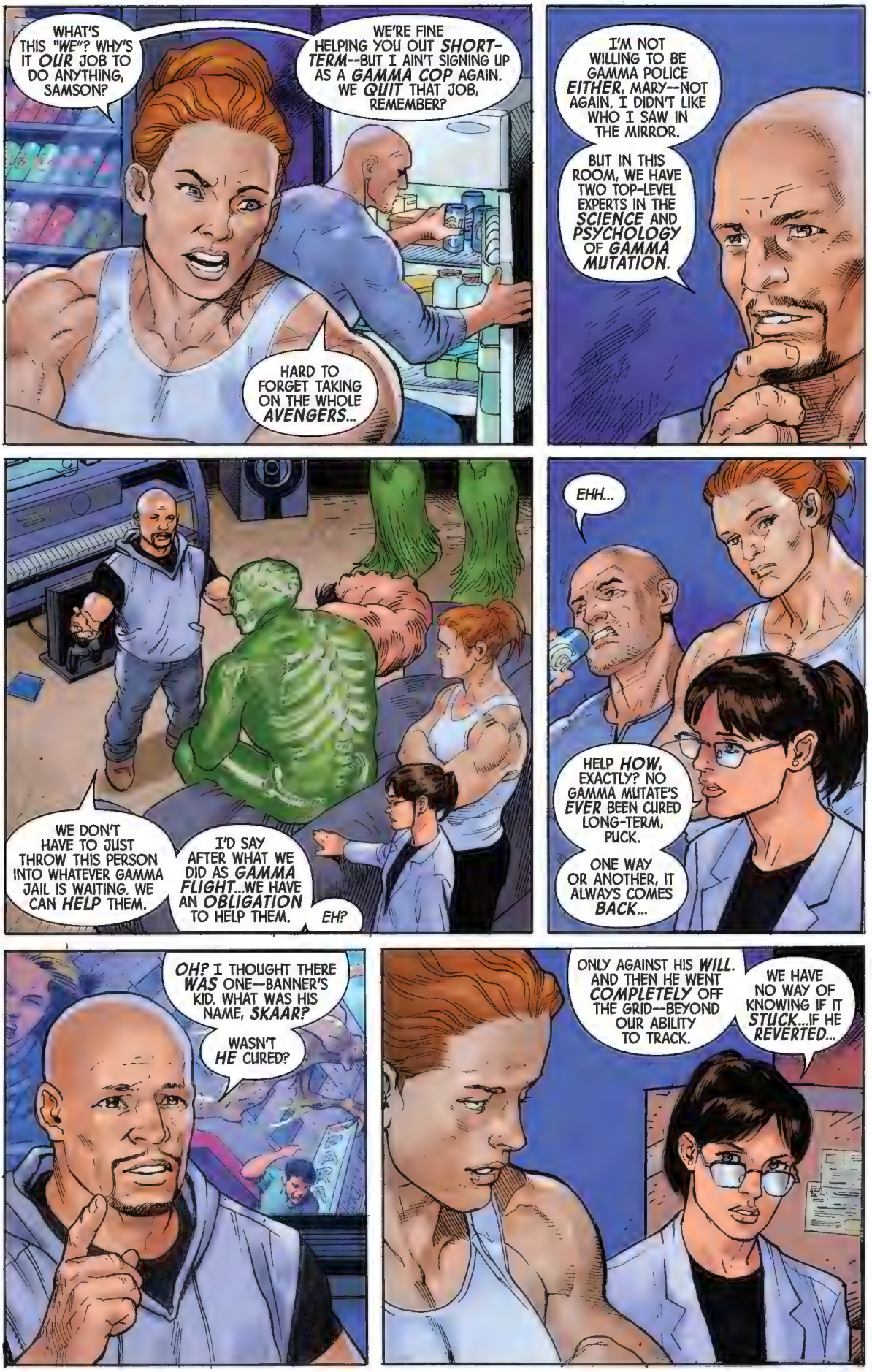
NAH, S.H.I.E.L.D. NAILED GLOB A WHILE BACK.

WELL, WHOEVER IT IS...

...THEY AIN'T MAKIN' LIFE EASY FOR THEMSELVES.

...

SO WHAT'RE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?


WHAT'S THIS "*WE*"? WHY'S IT *OUR* JOB TO DO ANYTHING, SAMSON?
WE'RE FINE HELPING YOU OUT *SHORT-TERM*--BUT I AIN'T SIGNING UP AS A *GAMMA COP* AGAIN. WE *QUIT* THAT JOB, REMEMBER?
HARD TO FORGET TAKING ON THE WHOLE *AVENGERS*...
I'M NOT WILLING TO BE GAMMA POLICE *EITHER*, MARY--NOT AGAIN. I DIDN'T LIKE WHO I SAW IN THE MIRROR.
BUT IN THIS ROOM, WE HAVE TWO TOP-LEVEL EXPERTS IN THE *SCIENCE* AND *PSYCHOLOGY* OF *GAMMA MUTATION*.
WE DON'T HAVE TO JUST THROW THIS PERSON INTO WHATEVER GAMMA JAIL IS WAITING. WE CAN *HELP* THEM.
I'D SAY AFTER WHAT WE DID AS *GAMMA FLIGHT*...WE HAVE AN *OBLIGATION* TO HELP THEM.
EH?
EHH...
HELP *HOW*, EXACTLY? NO GAMMA MUTATE'S *EVER* BEEN CURED LONG-TERM, PUCK.
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, IT ALWAYS COMES *BACK*...
*OH?* I THOUGHT THERE *WAS* ONE--BANNER'S KID. WHAT WAS HIS NAME, *SKAAR?*
WASN'T *HE* CURED?
ONLY AGAINST HIS *WILL*. AND THEN HE WENT *COMPLETELY* OFF THE GRID--BEYOND OUR ABILITY TO TRACK.
WE HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING IF IT *STUCK*...IF HE *REVERTED*...

ALL I CAN GO ON IS WHAT I'VE SEEN--AND WHAT I'VE SEEN ISN'T GOOD.
LOOK AT DEL. HE SPENT MONTHS IN A TUBE WHILE WE TRIED TO JUST ALLEVIATE HIS CONDITION--
AND NOW I'M NOT.
NOT CURED. I KNOW.
NO. NOT
NOT IN PAIN.
NOT IN PAIN.
OR IN A TUBE. HE'S NOT GIVING OFF GAMMA ANY-MORE, EH?
HE'S SAFE TO BE AROUND--AND THAT WAS YOU. YOUR WORK.
GREAT. WONDERFUL.
EVERY CRIME I COMMITTED FOR SHADOW BASE--NOT TO MENTION DR. BANNER--AND IT MAYBE HELPED ONE PERSON.
THAT'S NOT NOTHING, CHARLENE.
LOOK, WE CAN GO TO AUSTIN RIGHT NOW--FIND OUT WHY THIS MUTATE'S ON THE RAMPAGE. WE CAN HELP THEM.
AT LEAST GET THEM AWAY FROM CIVILIANS...
...AND AWAY FROM THE COPS.
THAT AIN'T NOTHING EITHER.
AW, C'MON.
WE AIN'T ACTUALLY DOING THIS, ARE WE...?

FINE. WE *ARE* DOING THIS.
BUT AFTERWARD, I GET TO ROB A BANK.
IF YOU'RE GOOD.
*CHARLENE*-- HOW CLOSE ARE WE TO THE *ACTION?*
ACCORDING TO THE SATELLITE FEED, THE MUTATE'S ON THE *NEXT* STREET.
NO, *WAIT*-- THEY'RE *MOVING* NOW. MOVING *TOWARD* YOU.
AND CLOSING *FAST.*
... *HOW* FAST?

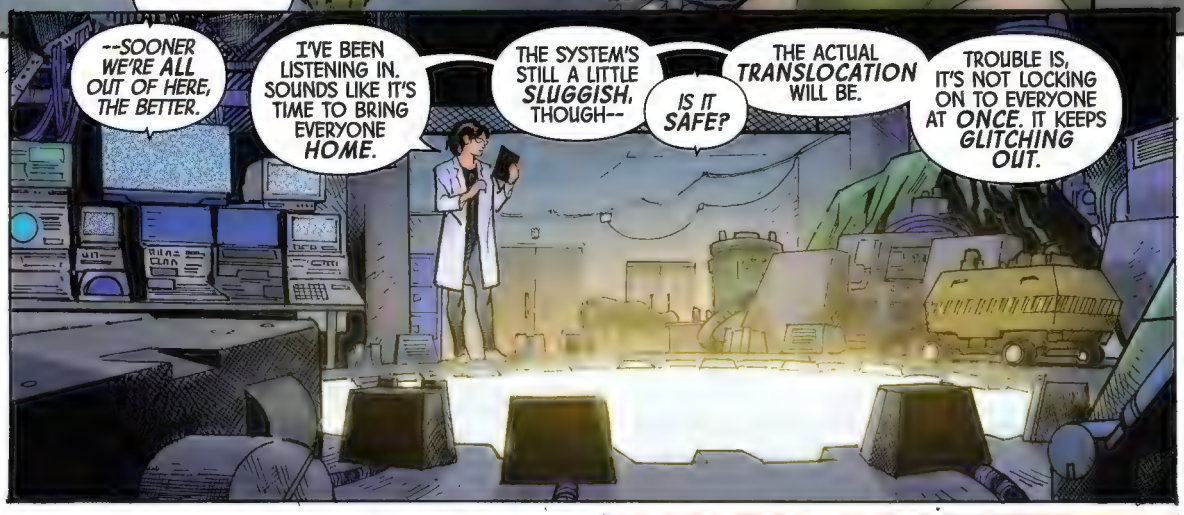
YOU'RE ONE OF THEIRS, AREN'T YOU? WELL, I'M NOT GOING BACK!
I'M NOT GOING BACK TO GREEN SPRING!
WRUNCH
HEY!
DOC SASQUATCH MIGHT BE A JERK, BUT HE'S OUR--
UNNH!
NO! NO MORE!
YOU'VE DONE ENOUGH, YOU SICK BASTARDS!
OH, WE AIN'T EVER MET BEFORE. TRUST ME.
YOU TANGLE WITH THE ABSORBING MAN AND TITANIA--

--YOU REMEMBER ALL ABOUT IT!
SHLORP
GEEZ!
PATHETIC. GREEN SPRING SENT YOU?
YOU CAN'T DO A THING TO ME. CAN'T EVEN HOLD ME.
AND YOU DAMN SURE CAN'T HURT ME---
THAT WORKS BOTH WAYS, SLIME LADY.
ADAMANTIUM-- LOOK IT UP.
CLANG
C'MON-- TAKE ANOTHER SHOT--
OR...WE COULD DO WHAT WE CAME HERE FOR, EH?
WE CAN HELP.
THAT'S WHERE I COME IN.
GIVE ME SOME SPACE, EVERYONE.

EXCUSE ME?
CAN WE JUST *TALK?* JUST FOR A MINUTE.
WHAT?
I'M NOT GOING TO HURT YOU. *NOBODY* HERE IS.
WHAT'S YOUR *NAME?*
DON'T GIVE ME THAT--YOU'RE WITH *THEM*, YOU CAME TO *COLLECT* ME--
I'M NOT WITH ANYBODY.
ALL *THIS*--THE HAIR, THE CLAWS, THE *HORROR*--IT'S SOMETHING THAT WAS *DONE* TO ME.
FROM WHAT YOU SAID, *YOU* DIDN'T HAVE AGENCY IN WHAT YOU'VE BECOME EITHER. MAYBE THERE'S *COMMON GROUND* THERE.
ANYWAY, MY NAME'S *LEONARD.*
*STOCKPILE!*
THAT'S THE NAME THEY *GAVE ME*--
I'D RATHER NOT USE SOME *CALL SIGN.*
WHAT'S YOUR *NAME?*
...YOU'RE *NOT* WITH THEM, ARE YOU?
DIONNE.
MY NAME'S *DIONNE.*

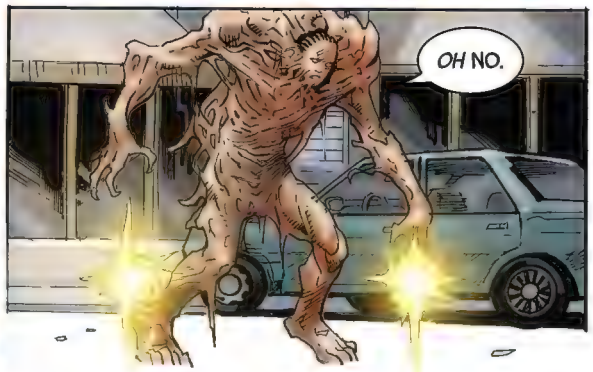
SPTANG
HEY!
WHAT THE HELL...?
STAND AWAY FROM THE SUSPECT!
HANDS ABOVE YOUR HEAD! THE HULKBUSTERS ARE ON THEIR WAY--YOU WILL BE CONTAINED!
THE HELL WITH THAT! WHAT, WAS THAT THE WARNING SHOT?
WE'RE TRYIN' TO HAVE A CONVERSATION HERE!
TITANIA--WAIT--
I WOULDN'T GET IN HER WAY, JUDD.
CRNCH
NOT WHILE SHE'S GOT THAT LOOK.
BLAM BLAM
SECRETS OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE, Y'KNOW?

I'LL GO AFTER HER. SHE ALREADY HATES ME...
NO, WE NEED YOU HERE TO--OH, FORGET IT.
EUGENE TO CHARLENE--
WHO WANTS SOME? HUH?
LET TITANIA SHOW YOU HOW TO REALLY ESCALATE A STANDOFF!


--SOONER WE'RE ALL OUT OF HERE, THE BETTER.
I'VE BEEN LISTENING IN. SOUNDS LIKE IT'S TIME TO BRING EVERYONE HOME.
THE SYSTEM'S STILL A LITTLE SLUGGISH, THOUGH--
IS IT SAFE?
THE ACTUAL TRANSLOCATION WILL BE.
TROUBLE IS, IT'S NOT LOCKING ON TO EVERYONE AT ONCE. IT KEEPS GLITCHING OUT.

JUST GRAB WHO YOU CAN. RIGHT NOW, ANYONE WE CAN BRING OUT IS GOOD.
IF YOU SAY SO.

TRANSLOCATING NOW.

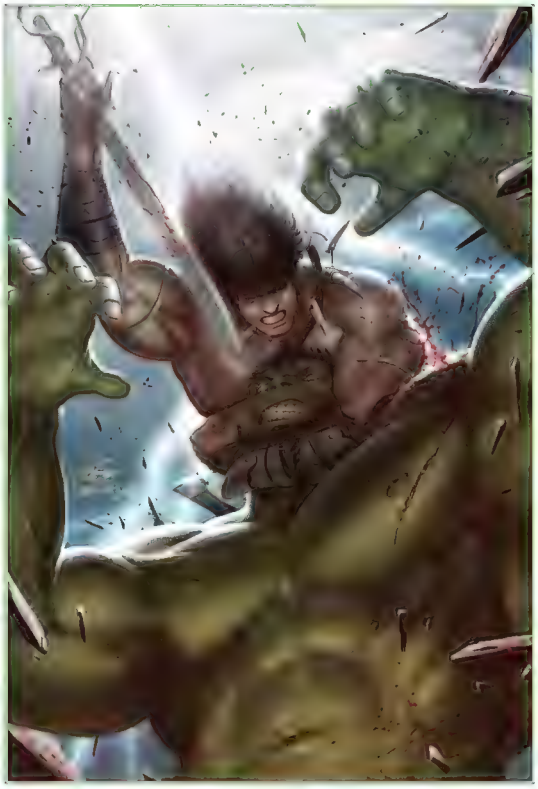

OH NO.

...
WELL, I STAND CORRECTED.
YOU LEFT SASQUATCH WITH TITANIA? YOU COULDN'T BRING BACK DIONNE?
I WAS LUCKY TO GET YOU. THE WHOLE SYSTEM'S FREEZING UP--I THINK WE SENT TOO MANY OUT AT ONCE.
I ONLY HOPE THE SYSTEM DOESN'T DECIDE TO--
...
REBOOT.
HOW LONG BEFORE IT'S BACK?
I'LL HAVE TO GO IN MANUALLY-- RECONFIGURE THE PAD, THEN TRIP THE BREAKERS.
UNTIL THEN-- LEN AND MARY ARE ON THEIR OWN.
AND THAT'S NOT EVEN THE BAD NEWS...
SO HERE'S THE THING ABOUT POWER.

IT'S REAL NICE TO HAVE SOME. ESPECIALLY IF YOU'VE NEVER REALLY KNOWN WHAT THAT'S LIKE.
WHAT'S WORSE THAN LEAVING MY WIFE WITH A SLIME HEAP AND DISCOUNT BIGFOOT FOR BACKUP?
YOU HEARD HER, RIGHT? DIONNE?
OH NO.
NOT YOU...
SHE ESCAPED FROM A LAB. SOMEONE GAVE HER A CODENAME.
SHE EXPECTED SOMEONE TO COLLECT HER-- SOMEONE WITH GAMMA.
BUT PRETTY SOON, SOMEONE COMES ALONG WHO'S GOT MORE.
BOOM
OH YES.
IT'S ME.
THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE BIGGER AND MEANER.
SO THAT MEANS SOMEBODY OUT THERE...
...IS BUILDING GAMMA MUTATES.
AND IF YOU PISS THEM OFF ENOUGH...

...THEY'LL ADAPT TOO.
YOUR OLD FRIEND SKAAR.
YOU'RE COMING HOME, STOCKPILE...
...DADDY'S ORDERS.
SOMEONE BIGGER

*DEFENDERS: THE BEST DEFENSE* VARIANT BY
SKOTTIE YOUNG



#10 CONAN VS. VARIANT BY
INHYUK LEE

#12 CONAN VS. VARIANT BY
WILL SLINEY & CHRIS SOTOMAYOR

#13 SKRULLS VARIANT BY
CHRIS STEVENS & MORRY HOLLOWELL

GAMMA FLIGHT 2
THE RETURN OF
SKAAR
SON OF
HULK

MY NAME IS LEONARD SAMSON, AND I WAS TRANSFORMED.
I STOLE FIRE FROM THE GODS.
SKAAR!
MY NAME IS LEONARD.
I WORKED WITH YOUR FATHER.
AND INSTEAD OF SHARING IT WITH MY FELLOW MAN, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE FUN TO PLAY WITH IT MYSELF.
BUT GODS-- REAL GODS...
I THINK WE CAN TALK THIS OU--

TCRACK
...THEY PUNISH HUBRIS.
TIME TO COME HOME, STOCKPILE!
NO CHANCE.
I KNOW WHAT HE'S DOING TO PEOPLE!
NOTHING. COMMS'RE DEAD.
WE CAN MAKE A RUN AT THE COPS--
WE'RE NOT CROOKS HERE, MARY!
WE CAME TO HELP DIONNE.
KZZZZZT
McGOWAN!
GET US THE HELL OUTTA HERE!
YOU ARE THE WORST FRIGGIN' FUGITIVE, LEN!

LEAVE HER ALONE!!!
YOU'RE STILL AWAKE?
GRK!
YOU EVER FIGHT A GOD BEFORE, BEAST?
JERK.
CALLING HIM NAMES WON'T HELP.
NOT HIM. YOU!
YOU RUN OFF TO PLAY HERO WHENEVER YOU NEED TO FEEL GOOD...
SKRAAAASH

"...AND LEAVE THE REST OF US IN THE DARK."
POWER'S OUT...
...IS OUT.
I THINK I CAN JURY-RIG THE COMMS TO A BATTERY.
ANYONE GOT A PHONE?
WHAT'S GOIN' ON, MCGOWAN?!
YOU LEFT MARY ALONE AGAINST HULK'S KID!
SYSTEM IS GREEN. I THINK WE JUST OVERLOADED THE POWER GRID BY RECALLING TWO PEOPLE AT ONCE.
GET THIS THING RUNNING!
NOW!
NEED POWER?
MAKE POWER?
NOT LIKE THAT, GUYS!
AND YOUR FREAKING OUT OVER YOUR WIFE IS ADORABLE, CARL...
...BUT I NEED TO FOCUS! BESIDES...

"...TITANIA CAN LAY THE HURT DOWN ON ANYONE!"
UNH...THIS ISN'T THE TIME, MARY!
BULL! YOU HAD TIME TO CALL ME A CROOK!
WELL, I AIN'T CHARLENE!
I DON'T HAVE TO TAKE YOUR ABUSIVE CRAP JUST BECAUSE I WANNA WRESTLE YOUR GREEN GRIZZLY BEAR!
KRAAAAACK
CHARLENE AND I...
I MEAN, YOU SHOULD KNOW WE HAVEN'T...
NOW YOU GOT TIME TO TALK?
LOOK, WE ALL KNOW YOU TWO ARE TRYING TO FIND SOMETHING THERE.
YOU AREN'T SUBTLE.

SHE LIKES GUYS WITH BIG BRAINS AND BODY HAIR.
AND SOON SHE'LL FIGURE OUT EUGENE'S JUST AS SMART, TWICE AS CHARMING...
...AND DOESN'T LECTURE HER ABOUT THE TELEPORTER SHE FRIGGIN' BUILT!
PATHETIC.
YOUR LIVES ARE ON THE LINE AND NEITHER OF YOU CAN...
...FOCUS?
WATCH YOUR SIX, SOLDIER!

MARY--
WHAT NOW?
YOU'RE RIGHT.
I MEAN, YOU DON'T STEAL A PATIENT'S POWERS...
...AND HIS GIRL...
...AND NOT FIGURE OUT YOU'RE KIND OF A--
MARY?
I'M LISTENING.
HOLD 'IM, DIONNE!
WHOKK
S'OUNA
I'VE TRIED TO BE BETTER THAN I WAS. BUT WITH THE STRESS LATELY...
...I'VE BEEN STRUGGLING TO CONTROL MY WORST IMPULSES.
YEAH. IT'S GOIN' AROUND.
AT LEAST TEMPER TANTRUM HERE IS CONTAINED...
KZZZK
--BROADCASTING?
EUGENE?
'BOUT TIME! WHAT'S GOING ON?

WE SEEM TO HAVE QUITE LITERALLY BLOWN A FUSE.
CHARLENE IS RUNNING EVERYTHING WE HAVE INTO THE CAPACITORS.
WE CAN PULL YOU HOME IN...
...LOOKS LIKE THREE MINUTES.
IZZAT MARY?
HEY, RED. YOU OKAY?
LITTLE SORE BUT FINE.
CHARLENE TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOU, BABY?
NO--SHE'S GOT ME ALL COPPERED UP AND SHE CALLED ME ADORABLE.
FINALLY, SOMEONE ELSE SE--
SHLURK
EIIIUGH!
KNNNNHT
MARY?!
MARY!
NO MORE RECHARGE!
I NEED THIS SCIENCE GADGET NOW!
SHOUTING WON'T MAKE THAT HAPPEN ANY FASTER!
THE HELL IT WON'T.

BOOM.
NOW YOU GOT A BACKUP.
THAT'S QUITE THE INGENIOUS BIT OF LATERAL THINKING.
NO!
NO NO NO NO NO!
TIME IS OUR ENEMY TODAY, DOCTOR.
WE'LL NIP OFF AND BE BACK BEFORE YOU GET THE LIGHTS ON.
THE TRANSLOCATOR IS A HUGELY COMPLEX DEVICE!
SO'S BEIN' A FIGHTER JET.
I'LL MANAGE.
JUST--
JUST KEEP YOURSELF FOCUSED ON MARY.
ALWAYS DO.

CAN'T HOLD HIM--
YOU THINK YOU CAN HOLD ME?!
GALACTUS COULDN'T STOP ME!
HULK COULDN'T STEAL MY BIRTHRIGHT!
YOU RUNTS WON'T EVEN TROUBLE MY SLEEP!
LITTLE MAN LIKES TO HEAR HIMSELF YELL.
QUITE ALL RIGHT...
MARTHA HERE LIKES TO YELL TOO.

HNNN!
SKREEEEEEG
NOW! WHILE HE'S DISTRACTED!
UNF!
HRK!
HA! SUCH A SOFT LITTLE MECHANICAL MAN!
SLICE
LOVELY FIGHT YOU HAVE HERE, LEONARD.
HE'S GOT HIS FATHER'S STRENGTH!
YES, YES. AND HIS MOTHER'S EYES.
THOSE FACIAL FINGERS, HOWEVER, DON'T LOOK LIKE A FAMILY TRAIT.
GODS, HOW I'VE MISSED THIS--
ATTENTION, GAMMA MUTATES!

POWER DOWN AND SURRENDER IMMEDIATELY! THIS IS YOUR FIRST AND LAST WARNING--

--FROM THE UNITED STATES HULKBUSTER FORCE!

ALL-NEW HULKBUSTERS. THIS GETS BETTER AND BETTER.

BY THE WAY, BALDY--

SKRGEEEEG

--I CAN HEAR WHEN YOUR GUN CHARGES UP!

I'M HIT--

THEY'RE SHOOTING AT US!

HULKBUSTERS--CHARGE!

THEY FOUND SOME NEW GAMMA COPS. BET THAT ARMOR WASN'T CHEAP.

OUR TAXES AT WORK.

THIS FEELS WEIRD...

YOU OKAY, BABY?

ON A PERSON, THIS'D BE A FLESH WOUND.

ON A TELEPORT MACHINE...WHO KNOWS?

LET'S TEST IT OUT.
THINGS ARE GETTING ROUGH AROUND HERE, EH?
TOO ROUGH FOR YOU, MAYBE.
I'M HAVING THE TIME OF MY LIFE!
DROP THE WEAPON-- NOW--
AHH!
THIS OLD THING?
SURE, WHY NOT?
I LIKE MY NEW ONE BETTER ANYWAY!
NO!
UNH!

LORD--HE'LL KILL SOMEONE--
SO FAR, HE'S ALL FLESH WOUNDS AND SHOWBOATING. I KNOW KILLERS, SAMSON--THIS AIN'T THAT.
ARE THE LOCAL GOONS GONNA GET A FEW BRUISES AND BROKEN TOYS? SURE.
BUT DO YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT THAT?
I DO, ACTUALLY.
BUT SHE'S RIGHT. IF SKAAR WANTED ANYONE DEAD, THEY'D BE DEAD RIGHT NOW.
PRETTY SURE WE GOTTA GO NOW--
DIONNE? ARE YOU WITH US?
SURE.
BETTER THE DEVIL I DON'T KNOW...
SO EITHER I ACT LIKE I KNOW MORE THAN THE EXPERT--AGAIN--
--OR I PUT MY HUBRIS ASIDE FOR ONCE.
DIONNE'S WHO WE CAME TO HELP. SHE'S PUT HER TRUST IN ME.
SHE HAS TO BE THE PRIORITY.
WE'RE ON A WING AND A PRAYER AT THIS POINT, FOLKS. I KNOW HOW MY TECH WORKS--I DON'T KNOW CARL'S MAGIC VERSION.
JUST...FOCUS ON HOME. ALL OF YOU.
SO I FOCUS ON HOME. I FOCUS ON CHARLENE.
AND HOW TO SAY SORRY, FOR EVERYTHING...

...BUT THAT'S THE THING ABOUT *HUBRIS*.

IT COMES IN MANY FORMS...

...AND THE GODS PUNISH IT *ALL*.

YOU GOT THIS, BABY?

I--I *GOT IT*--I GOT IT--

--I--

--I DON'T GOT IT--

*WITHOUT MERCY.*

EEEYAAARRGHH

DEAR LORD--

CARL?

LEN? *ARE YOU THERE?*

I'VE *LOST* YOUR *SIGNAL*-- *RESPOND!*

*EUGENE! ANY OF YOU! RESPOND!*

--THEY--THEY *DISINTEGRATED*--

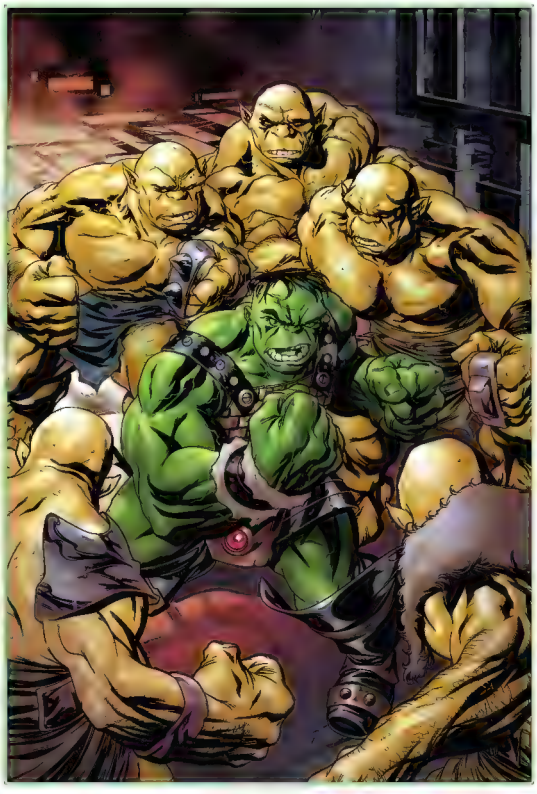
*FOCUS, JENKINS!*

WE'VE STILL GOT A JOB TO DO--
YEAH? GOING ALL IN ON PLAYING HULKBUSTERS, ARE WE?
WELL, I'VE GOT YOUR HULK RIGHT HERE!
ALL THE HULK YOU NEED!
LIVE FEED
WHAT A DISASTER.
AT LEAST OUR ENEMIES TOOK THEMSELVES OFF THE BOARD...

UNDISCLOSED LOCATION.
...BUT STOCKPILE WAS ONE OF THE MORE EFFECTIVE GRAFTS. EVEN IF SHE WAS A LOST CAUSE AT THIS POINT, IT'S A SHAME TO SEE HER GO.
HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT, COMMANDER?
HA! IS THAT A SCIENTIFIC QUERY, DOCTOR ALBA?
IF SHE IS DEAD... I FEEL A LITTLE REMORSE, I SUPPOSE. BUT IT IS BURIED DEEP.
WELL, SKAAR'S MISSION IS OVER. AND BRAWLING WITH THE HULKBUSTERS GETS US NOWHERE.
I'LL CALL HIM IN--
WHY?
"THE BOY IS IN NO DANGER. LET HIM PUT ON A SHOW, YES?
"SHOW THEM THEIR OLD WEAPONS ARE USELESS. DRIVE UP DEMAND FOR OUR SOLUTION."
IF YOU SAY SO, COMMANDER. YOU'RE THE BOSS.
BOSS OF NOTHING WITHOUT YOUR HELP, ALIANA. WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER.
AND WE KNOW EACH OTHER WELL ENOUGH NOT TO... WHAT IS THE PHRASE... STAND ON CEREMONY.

CALL ME EMIL.
WITHOUT MERCY

#15 *MARVELS* 25TH TRIBUTE VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS



#16 ASGARDIAN VARIANT BY
MIKE McKONE & RAIN BEREDO

#16 IMMORTAL VARIANT BY JOE BENNETT, BELARDINO BRABO & LAURA MARTIN

GAMMA FLIGHT 3

MY NAME IS EUGENE JUDD, AND I WAS TRANSFORMED.
WHEN I WAS A BOY, I WANTED ADVENTURE, AND I SET OUT TO LOOK FOR IT. TO SEE ALL THERE WAS TO SEE IN THE WORLD.
I'VE FOUGHT IN SPAIN AND IN SPACE. I'VE HUNTED GODS AND CAGED DEMONS. I'VE BEEN A WANTED CRIMINAL AND CANADA'S NATIONAL HERO.
I'VE LIVED, AND I'VE DIED. I'VE SEEN HELL AND THE HELL BELOW THAT.
A LIFE LIKE MINE... IT CHANGES A MAN.
AND I'LL ADMIT--THERE ARE TIMES, EVEN NOW, WHEN I THINK I'VE BEEN EVERY PLACE THERE IS TO GO.

THIS ISN'T ONE OF THOSE TIMES, *EH?*

THIS PLACE... IT'S LIKE THE *DESERT.*

BUT THE SKY--THE LAND--IT'S ALL *WRONG...*

WHEREVER IT IS, IT'S GOT *FAUNA--*

--AND THEY'RE NOT EXACTLY *FRIENDLY!*

MR. *CREEL*--IF YOU CAN TAKE US BACK THE WAY WE *CAME* AT ANY POINT, IT'D BE *APPRECIATED--*

I--I *CAN'T!*

I CAN'T *CHANGE* EITHER! I'M *STUCK* LIKE THIS!

THIS IS *MY FAULT*--WE'RE IN *HELL*, AND IT'S *MY FAULT*, JUST LIKE BEFORE...

*WHAT?*

HE'S THINKING OF A *PREVIOUS ADVENTURE**--BUT HE'S *WRONG.* THIS IS NO HELL *I'VE* EVER BEEN TO.

LEN, BACK ME UP.

**SEE IMMORTAL HULK VOL. 3: HULK IN HELL! --WIL*

IT'S NOT THE *BELOW-PLACE*, THAT'S FOR SURE...

COULD BE *SPACE*, I GUESS, OR THE *FUTURE*, POST-APOCALYPSE...

*BACK UP.* YOU'VE ALL BEEN TO HELL? *LITERAL HELL?*

JUDD'S BEEN *EVERYWHERE*--AIN'T THAT RIGHT?

I DON'T THINK I WAS EVER ON A *BATTLEWORLD*, MARY--YOU'VE GOT ME BEAT THERE.

BUT EVEN SO, BETWEEN US, WE'VE GOT A LOT OF EXPERIENCE DEALING WITH *STRANGE PLACES...*

...AND WE AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WORKING ON THE PROBLEM.
OH GOD.
THEY'RE GONE...
NO READINGS ON THEM ANYWHERE IN AUSTIN...
...ANYWHERE IN TEXAS...
DON'T PANIC, CHARLENE...
I...I FEEL...

NOT NOW, RICK. THIS...THIS IS BAD.
BEST-CASE SCENARIO IS THAT THEY'RE SOMEWHERE RANDOM BUT STILL ON EARTH...
...SOMEWHERE WE CAN FIND THEM.
THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO...
...THEY'RE FUSED INTO SOLID ROCK.
...A MOUNTAIN SOMEWHERE.
...OR AT THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN.
...OR THE EARTH'S CORE.
...OR DRIFTING IN SPACE.
...OR JUST... DISINTEGRATED.
THEY'RE DEAD.
THEY'RE ALL DEAD.

NO. LISTEN.
I... FEEL...
GUYS, PLEASE--WE'RE ALL FEELING SCARED. BUT WE NEED TO FOCUS.
I'LL TAP INTO SOME MORE SATELLITES, EVEN THOUGH THERE'S A RISK THAT GYRICH WILL--
NO!
JUST LISTEN!
TWO OF US HERE--AND IT'S HARD!
HARD TO FIND WORDS. HARD TO THINK. HARD ALL THE TIME. SO...
SO WHEN HE TALKS, YOU NEED TO-- TO--
-TO LISTEN!
RICK-- HE KNOWS THINGS--HE--
--HE KNOWS THINGS.
BUT IT'S HARD.
...
I'M SORRY, DEL.
WHAT DID YOU NEED TO TELL ME, RICK?
I CAN... FEEL THEM.
OUT THERE... THEY...
THEY'RE ALIVE...
"WE'RE NOT DEAD, AT LEAST."

AND THESE CREEPY-CRAWLIES ARE THINKING TWICE NOW. GUESS WE DON'T MAKE GOOD EATING.
THEY'RE NOT DEMONS FROM HELL, CARL--JUST A KIND OF ANIMAL.
NO KIND OF ANIMAL I EVER SAW.
LIKE NOTHING I'VE EVER SEEN EITHER. THIS IS NEW TERRITORY.
DON'T SMILE TOO MUCH, EUGENE--YOU'LL UNNERVE THE OTHERS...
DON'T RETREAT! FORTIFY! POWER FOR BODY AND MIND!
ALL OF YOU--TAKE A LOOK. BUILDINGS.
WE'RE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF SOMEWHERE. THE COLORS ARE A LITTLE OFF, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE A NORMAL TOWN...
MOSTLY INTACT TOO. ANOTHER STRIKE AGAINST YOUR HELL THEORY, MR. CREEL--THEY DON'T DO BUILDING MAINTENANCE DOWN THERE.
YEAH, YEAH. WE'RE STILL STUCK, AND IT'S STILL MY FAULT...
NOBODY LIKES A WHINER, HONEY.
LET'S MOVE IN CLOSE AND CAREFUL, EH?
DIONNE? YOU OKAY?
...SURE. IT'S JUST...SOMETHING TITANIA SAID.
THAT THIS COULD BE THE FUTURE.
SHE'S HOLDING SOMETHING BACK. HARD TO BLAME HER FOR NOT QUITE TRUSTING US.

I HAVE AN IDEA WHAT IT COULD BE... BUT LET'S SEE.
THE NEAR FUTURE...
I SEE PEOPLE WORKING THAT CONSTRUCTION SITE...
MAYBE US NONHUMAN TYPES OUGHTA HANG BACK--WE DON'T WANT TROUBLE, RIGHT?
THAT'S SMART THINKING, CARL, AND NORMALLY I'D AGREE...
...BUT WE'RE ALREADY IN TROUBLE UP TO OUR EARS--SO LET'S BRAZEN IT OUT.
THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN IS--
...
I SHOULD STOP SAYING THINGS LIKE THAT, EH?

SOME KIND OF-- OF *GAMMA ZOMBIES!*

THEY'RE *ATTACKING*--

THANKS FOR THE *COLOR COMMENTARY*, SAMSON!

DAMMIT-- WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY *MADE* OF?

DON'T *HURT* THEM!

I *CAN'T* HURT 'EM! THIS AIN'T DOING *SQUAT!*

LIKE FIGHTING IN A *DREAM*...

*I'M* NOTICING THAT TOO.

I'M STARTING TO DEVELOP A *THEORY* ABOUT OUR MYSTERIOUS LOCATION...

EVERYONE FORM A SQUARE-- FIGHT *BACK-TO-BACK*--

*NO!* *THIS WAY!* ALL OF YOU!

THROUGH THAT *WALL*...?

THIS OLD FACTORY'S A *STORAGE FACILITY* NOW.

*MOST PEOPLE* DON'T KNOW THAT--

--SO IT'LL BE EMPTY!
QUICK--GET INSIDE.
JUST GOTTA ABSORB SOME OF THIS JUNK...
THEN I CAN PROCESS IT...
...EXTRUDE IT...
...AND WE CAN GET A SECOND TO BREATHE.
NICE WORK, DIONNE.
SO...YOU KNOW THIS PLACE PRETTY WELL, IT SEEMS.
WE WERE ALL THINKING OF HOME WHEN MR. CREEL TRANSLOCATED US...
BUT HOME'S ONLY BEEN HOME FOR US FOR A FEW WEEKS, EH?
THIS IS THOMASVILLE, TEXAS.
I'VE BEEN STATIONED HERE THE LAST YEAR OR SO. THE CLOSEST THING TO HOME I HAD...
...UNTIL THEY WENT TOO FAR AND I WENT AWOL.

SO WHO'S THEY?
THE PEOPLE WHO MADE ME WHAT I AM.
THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE GAMMA GRAFTS.
PROJECT GREEN SPRING.
THE PROJECT WAS SOLD TO ME BY...SOMEONE I TRUSTED.
SUPPOSED TO BE A MILITARY UPGRADE--SOMETHING THAT'D HELP US COMPETE WITH THE HYDRAS AND THE A.I.M.S--
--AND THE HULKS.
YEAH. AND THE HULKS.
BUT I FOUND OUT THE--THE GUY BEHIND IT--HE HAD OTHER PLANS.
THAT'S WHEN I RAN.
THERE'S A CATCH IN HER VOICE--SHE'S STILL HIDING SOMETHING. BUT LET'S NOT PUSH. EH?
YOU SAW THE BILLBOARD--"FORTIFY," THEY CALL IT. THEY SELL IT AS A BRAIN/BODY SUPPLEMENT.
BUT IT'S THE SAME GRAFTS THEY USED ON ME...
...AND SKAAR.
A SMALLER SIZE THOUGH. LODGING IN THE BODY LIKE TAPEWORMS. RELEASING THE GAMMA SLOWLY.
AT FIRST, PEOPLE ARE STRONGER. THEY HEAL BETTER. BUT THE LONG-TERM RESULTS...
...WELL, I GUESS NOW WE KNOW WHAT THOSE ARE.
WELCOME TO THE FUTURE...
THE FUTURE? MAYBE SO.
BUT I STILL HAVE MY OWN THEORIES ABOUT THAT...

I FEEL THEM.
IN--IN THE SHADOWS.
SHADOWS?
YOU MEAN IT'S DARK WHERE THEY ARE?
IS IT NIGHT? ARE THEY IN--?
NOT LIKE-- NO.
HARD TO--TO--
I CAN'T--
--CAN'T THINK!
DOC--
YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEMS...
THEY'RE CONJOINED, AREN'T THEY?
IT'S...LIKE YOUR THOUGHTS ARE JAMMING EACH OTHER'S BRAINS.
WHEN I FIRST CAME OUT AND THINGS GOT BAD...
...I STARTED HAVING PANIC ATTACKS.
EVERY PART OF MY BRAIN, PULLING IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS.

I WANT YOU TO TOSS THIS BALL FROM ONE HAND TO--
I'M NOT A KID!
I KNOW. I KNOW...
WHEN PARTS OF MY MIND WON'T WORK TOGETHER, I GIVE IT SOMETHING SIMPLE TO FOCUS ON...
...AND THE REST STARTS TO SETTLE INTO PLACE.
JUST TALK TO THE BALL.
WHATEVER COMES TO MIND.
I--I CAN FEEL THEM.
LIKE WHEN I FEEL THE GAMMA IN PEOPLE.
IT'S LIKE... THEY'RE GAMMA.
I MISS MY DAD.
S HE KNOW I'M ALIVE?
I FEEL THEM TOO.
EAST?
OKAY!
THAT'S A START.
I THINK WE'RE HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION...

SO I TRANSPORTED US TO SOME KINDA POST-HULKPOCALYPSE FUTURE?
NOT QUITE, CARL.
I'D LIKE TO PATCH YOU UP. UNLESS YOU CAN CHANGE BACK?
NAH. IT'S LIKE NOTHING HERE'S GOT ENOUGH SUBSTANCE FOR ME TO PULL IT OUT.
LIKE TRYIN' TO TUG ON SNOT.
JUST HOW MANY OF THEM FORTIFY ZOMBIES ARE WE GONNA NEED TO PUNCH OUR WAY THROUGH?
CHARMING. YET INSIGHTFUL.
HOLD STILL, EH?
TOWN POPULATION'S 40,000. IF EVEN TEN PERCENT TOOK THE SUPPLEMENT...
...WE MIGHT HAVE TO FIGHT THROUGH THOUSANDS OF THOSE THINGS.
MAYBE NOT.

THEY'RE BACK AT WORK. JUST HOW THEY WERE.
LIKE THEY FORGOT WE EXISTED.
MORE LIKE NEVER KNEW WE WERE HERE.
THOSE'RE SOME UGLY BLOOD CELLS, EUGENE.
I THINK WE'RE TRAPPED IN SOME SORT OF GAMMA VERSION OF THE ASTRAL PLANE.
NOT THE BELOW-PLACE, BUT CONNECTED TO IT-- A KIND OF "GAMMA PURGATORY," MAYBE.
OR WHERE THE GAMMA INSIDE PEOPLE GOES WHEN IT'S, AH...
...NOT DEPLOYED?
SO THOSE GAMMA ZOMBIES ARE PROJECTIONS... ASTRAL FORMS...
YOU WANNA EXPLAIN THAT?
DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOUR BODY FIGHTS A DISEASE?
MAYBE YOU FEEL A LITTLE OFF, EH? BUT THE MIND DOESN'T TRACK WHAT EVERY WHITE BLOOD CELL IS DOING.
YOU'RE TELLING ME THIS ISN'T THE FUTURE? THERE'RE ALREADY THAT MANY PEOPLE WITH A FORTIFY GRAFT?
THAT'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN WONDERING. IF THESE ARE GRAFTS, WHERE DID THEY--?
RRRRRRRRRR
WATCH YOUR FEET, SAMSON--
WHAT IS THAT? SOME KIND OF CONCEALED ENTRANCE...?
IT CAN'T BE...!
RRRGRGRGRGRGRGRGRRRR

GENERAL REGINALD FORTEAN. THE SHADOW BASE COMMANDER BEFORE BRUCE BANNER TOOK OVER--THE ONE WHO HUNTED THE HULK.
LORD, HIS NECK'S BROKEN...
YOU SICK BASTARD!
YOU USED ME!
...
DIONNE?
EASY. I DON'T THINK HE'S IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT.
I...I WAS GONE... FOR A LONG TIME...
BUT THEN THERE WAS A DOOR. A GREEN DOOR.
IT CALLED ME BACK FROM SOMEWHERE, BUT...

...BUT THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE HERE WHEN I CAME BACK...
GENERAL?
REG.
IT'S LEONARD SAMSON. WE NEED TO KNOW ANYTHING YOU CAN TELL US ABOUT PROJECT GREEN SPRING.
GREEN SPRING?
THE MILITARY UPGRADE PROGRAM. YOU'RE MAKING SLEEPER AGENTS--
NO... THEY...
THEY'RE MAKING AN INSURRECTION.
HMMM...WIND UP THE LOCALS. FEED THEIR FEARS. PROVIDE THEM WITH A WEAPON. INSIDIOUS.
YEAH, C.I.A. PERFECTED THAT FORMULA BEFORE I WAS BORN.
BUT NOT WITH UNDETECTABLE SUPERHUMANS...
DIONNE.
I...I...
I NEVER DID RIGHT BY YOU.
I'M SO SORRY...
YOU GAVE ME DIRECTION.
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING--
NO!
NOT YET-- NOT--
...I NEVER TOLD YOU I--

--GOT SOMETHING!
YOU'RE ALIVE!
THANK YOU, CHARLENE.
YOU'RE BRILLIANT.
I JUST PLAYED SUPPORT THIS TIME.
SO HOW DID...?
RICK FOUND YOU.
AND DEL PULLED YOU OUT. WITH A FEW MODIFICATIONS.
I'M SPOOKY

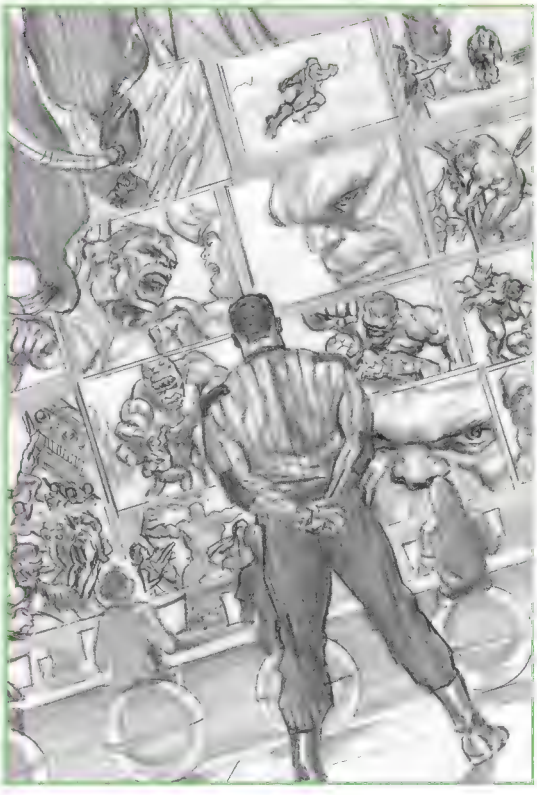
WHEN I WAS A BOY, I WANTED ADVENTURE, AND I SET OUT TO LOOK FOR IT.
THAT BASTARD WORE HIS FACE.
I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE CRIMINALS OR TERRORISTS.
I'M GOING TO HELP YOU RIP HIM DOWN BRICK BY BRICK.
TO SEE ALL THERE WAS TO SEE IN THE WORLD.
NO.
AND TO SOMEONE WHO TRAVELS...
...AN ADVENTURER...
WE'RE GOING TO HELP YOU.
...A MILITARY BRAT...
WHY DON'T YOU TELL THEM YOUR NAME, SOLDIER?
...HOME ISN'T WHERE YOU ARE.

MY NAME IS SERGEANT DIONNE FORTEAN.
AND SOMEONE IS USING MY FATHER'S FACE TO TEAR DOWN MY NATION.
IT'S WHO YOU LOVE.
IT'S FAMILY.
NEW TERRITORY

#19 *MARVELS* 25TH TRIBUTE VARIANT BY
GREG SMALLWOOD

#20 CARNAGE-IZED VARIANT BY
NICK BRADSHAW & RACHELLE ROSENBERG

#20 2ND PRINTING VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS



#21 3RD PRINTING VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

GAMMA FLIGHT 4

THEN.
MY NAME IS DIONNE FORTEAN, AND I WAS TRANSFORMED.
THE MARINES TOOK A BRAT AND TURNED HER INTO A SOLDIER.
SOMEONE MY FATHER COULD BE PROUD OF.
AND WHEN MY COUNTRY DECIDED THEY DIDN'T WANT ME...
RIIIIIIIIING

...I WAS STILL SOMEONE *HE* WAS PROUD OF.
GEEZ, DAD...WHAT DID BANNER *DO* TO YOU?
AN UNPLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCE.
BUT ONE THAT ALLOWED ME TO *SURVIVE*...
...AND I'M STILL THE SAME MAN *INSIDE*.
YOU DO *TRUST* YOUR FATHER, DON'T YOU, SOLDIER?
I NEED PEOPLE *I* CAN TRUST.
I NEED... *FAMILY.*
YES, SIR.

DR. ALIANA ALBA WAS SOME KIND OF GENIUS WITH GAMMA MUTATION. A LOT OF SCARS. MOST OF THEM NOT PHYSICAL.
I CANNOT OVEREMPHASIZE HOW MUCH YOU SHOULD NOT LOOK INTO THE RAY DEVICE ONCE ACTIVATED.
SKAAR WAS MUSCLE. AND ANGER.
NO PAINKILLERS.
MET A LOT OF GUYS LIKE HIM IN THE CORPS. EVERYTHING TO PROVE.
I'M SORRY, WAS I SUPPOSED TO OFFER?
AND DAD.
SUBJECT B.
ABOMINATION.
VRRRRRRRRRRR
SOON ENOUGH, YOU'LL HAVE YOUR OWN TASTE OF THIS POWER.
ONCE WE KNOW IT'S SAFE.
GRAAAAAARGH!
WE WERE GOING TO SAVE THE NATION.
YOU OKAY, MAN?
DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL HAPPY TO LET ME TAKE ALL THE RISKS?
LIE DOWN ON THE TABLE.
NO MATTER WHAT IT TURNED US INTO.

NOW.

I DIDN'T *KNOW* IT WAS AN INSURRECTION. BUT I ALSO DIDN'T *ASK*.

I WAS *PISSED OFF*, AND I LET HIM TURN ME INTO A *MONSTER* BECAUSE I THOUGHT IT WOULD MAKE ME MORE *IMPORTANT* THAN THE PEOPLE WHO *HURT* ME.

DAMN, DO I RELATE.

*HA!* RIGHT, RED?

DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP, DIONNE.

SOUNDS LIKE WE'RE DEALING WITH THE *ORIGINAL* ABOMINATION, *EMIL BLONSKY*.

HE WAS A CUNNING LITTLE MOLE WELL *BEFORE* HE INHERITED YOUR FATHER'S SECRETS.

STILL, HOW DOES ONE SILVER-TONGUED *GILA MONSTER* SWAY THE HEARTS OF AN ENTIRE *TOWN?*

*A.M. RADIO*, APPARENTLY.

I MODIFIED THE TRANSLOCATOR TO DETECT *LOCAL BROADCASTS* AROUND THOMASVILLE.

I WAS HOPING TO PICK UP *BASE CHATTER*, BUT INSTEAD GOT *THIS*...

--THE AFTERMATH OF THE *AUSTIN ATTACK*, IT'S OBVIOUS THE *GOVERNMENT* WON'T PROTECT YOU!

WE HAVE THE *RIGHT* TO BEAR ARMS. WHY DO THEY SUSPEND THAT RIGHT WHEN IT COMES TO THE MONSTERS *THEY* MAKE?

BECAUSE THEY *WANT* YOU TO BE AFRAID.

THEY WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT IF YOU STEP OUT OF LINE, THEY'LL DRAG AMERICA INTO A DITCH AND PUT A *GAMMA-POWERED BULLET* THROUGH IT.

THIS IS *REG FORTEAN*, A *REAL* HULKBUSTER, TELLING YOU: *DON'T RETREAT-- FORTIFY!*

TURN THAT OFF.

PROJECTION. FEARMONGERING. POPULISM.

CLASSIC *BRAINWASHING*, NOW AVAILABLE STREAMING IN THE HOME.

THAT'S THE PART OF THE OPERATION I NEVER *KNEW* ABOUT.

NOT UNTIL I CAUGHT ONE OF THOSE BROADCASTS AT THE *CIRCLE Q.* OWNER WAS STOCKING THOSE...

*...SUPPLEMENTS.*

SO WHAT DO WE DO HERE? CALL UP GYRICH LIKE...
"HEY, I KNOW YOU TRIED TA KILL US, BUT TEXAS'S GOT A GAMMA PROBLEM. DO US A SOLID?"
YEAH, 'CAUSE PETE WOULD JUST HATE HAVIN' A COUPLE THOUSAND NEW GAMMA SOLDIERS...
I HAVE A THOUGHT.
YOU SAID DR. ALBA IS USING SOME KIND OF RAY TO STABILIZE THE TISSUE?
YEAH. WEIRD RED BEAM. SMELLS LIKE A THUNDERSTORM.
OH NO...
THAT DAMN THING'S AN ALBATROSS AROUND MY NECK.
ENOUGH DRAMA, LEN. JUST TELL US!
THEY'RE USING MY CATHEXIS RAY.
REMEMBER HOW I TOLD YOU I STOLE THE HULK'S POWERS?
AND HIS GIRL.
THANK YOU, MARY.
"THE CATHEXIS RAY IS HOW I ACCOMPLISHED THAT LITTLE STUNT. I CREATED IT, AND IT'S BEEN MAKING NEW HULKS EVER SINCE."

BUT IF THESE GRAFTS NEED A BOOST OF GAMMA TO BE SELF-SUSTAINING, I CAN USE THE RAY TO DISRUPT THAT RADIATION SIGNATURE.
THEY'LL WITHER AND DIE, REVERTING THE HOSTS TO NORMAL.
BUT THAT STILL LEAVES THREE THOUSAND POTENTIAL GAMMA ZOMBIES WE GOTTA HUNT DOWN AND ZAP.
MAYBE NOT.
WE KNOW THEY HAVE HIGH-POWER BROADCAST EQUIPMENT. I CAN JURY-RIG THAT TO TRANSMIT THE CATHEXIS PULSE ACROSS TOWN.
USING ABOMINATION'S PLATFORM TO DISARM HIS SOLDIERS.
POETIC.
YER ALL FORGETTIN' THAT WE CAN'T JUST WALK INTO A TOWN FULL OF MINI-HULKS...
MR. CARL?
I THINK I CAN.
...OKAY.

DEE-DEET
DEE-DEET
EMIL.
I THINK YOU'LL WANT TO SEE THIS.
INTERESTING.
I SUPPOSE THIS EXPLAINS THAT STRANGE PRICKLE UP MY SPINE DURING YESTERDAY'S IMPROMPTU GATHERING.
HOW'D THEY GET SO CLOSE WITHOUT ANYONE NOTICING?
THEIR CONJOINED BOYS SEEM TO HAVE A... A "GAMMA SENSE."
THEY CAN SENSE OUR HOSTS AT RANGE. HE'S GUIDING THEM AROUND THE LOCALS.
I'LL GRAB A COUPLE BANE TROOPS AND STOP THEM.
I'M READY FOR THAT REMATCH...
NOT SO FAST.
NO NEED TO STOP THEM, SON.

THEY'RE JUST BRINGING MY LOST LITTLE GIRL *HOME*.
SO LET THEM REACH THE FACTORY.
THEN *YOU* CAN KILL *THEM*... WHILE *I*...
SHHLURCH
...WEARING MY *TRUE* FACE...
...WILL *PERSONALLY* TEACH OUR AWOL SOLDIER WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SHE DISAPPOINTS...
"DADDY."

STILL DON'T SEE THE POINT IN DOIN' THIS...
SAVING THIS TOWN FROM THEIR OWN WORST IMPULSES?
FRANKLY? YEAH.
I'VE KNOWN TOO MANY VILLAINS.
A GUY WANTS POWER, WHATEVER HIS EXCUSE...
...FEAR, HATE, THINKS HE'S BETTER THAN YOU...
...HE FINDS A WAY TO GET IT.
TAKE THEIR GAMMA, THEY'LL JUST FIND SOMETHING ELSE.
THIS CROWD? PROB'LY GUNS.
THESE PEOPLE CAN GROW JUST AS YOU HAVE, CARL.
ALL WE CAN DO IS TAKE AWAY THEIR ABILITY TO HURT THEMSELVES AND OTHERS UNTIL THEN.

ANY TOWNSFOLK IN *RANGE*, DEL?
DEL?
I CAN FEEL THEM. BUT...MOVING *AWAY*.
NOT COMING *HERE*
LOOKS LIKE THEY FIXED UP THE *HOLE* WE LEFT--UNLESS THAT JUST HAPPENED IN THE *GAMMA ASTRAL PLANE*...
BEST TO LEAVE THAT KIND OF PUZZLE FOR THE *QUIET* MOMENTS, *EH*, DIONNE?
RIGHT.
AND *SPEAKING* OF QUIET--ABSORBING THIS BRICKWORK MAKES FOR A NICE, QUIET *ENTRANCE*.
DEL'S DONE SUCH A GREAT JOB HELPING US *SNEAK IN*, IT'D BE A *SHAME* TO LET ANYONE KNOW WE WERE...
CRUNGG
...HERE.
CRUNGG
IS THAT THE SECRET ELEVATOR FROM *BEFORE*? IT LOOKS *DENTED*--LIKE SOMEONE'S...
CRUNGGG

LIKE SOMEONE'S *PUNCHING UP THROUGH IT.*

*BRACE YOURSELVES,* FOLKS--

--WE HAVE *COMPANY!*

*WHAAMM*

*STOCKPILE.*

AND I KNEW *WHO* FROM THE SECOND I HEARD THE SOUND. BECAUSE WHO'D *DO* THAT? WHO WOULDN'T JUST...*USE THE ELEVATOR?*

SOMEONE WITH A LOT OF *ANGER* TO TAKE OUT AND A LOT OF *MUSCLE* TO DO IT WITH. SOMEONE WHO JUST WANTS TO *PROVE* SOMETHING.

I'VE MET A *LOT* OF PEOPLE LIKE SKAAR...

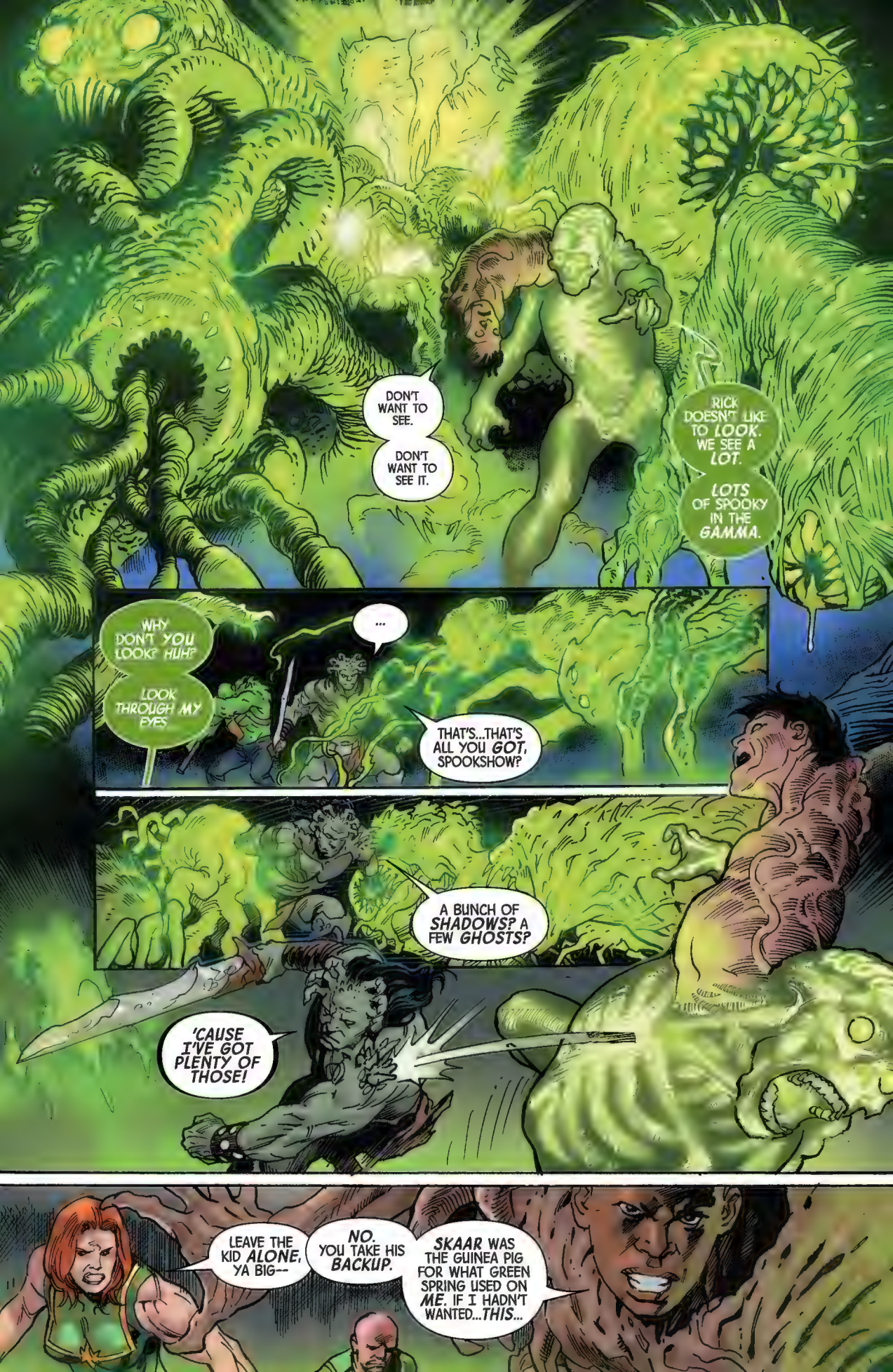
LET ME *GUESS*--YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE BEING *SNEAKY,* DIDN'T YOU? YOU AND YOUR LITTLE FRIENDS.

BUT ALL THE TIME, YOU WERE JUST WALKING INTO THE TRAP...

"...AND NOW IT'S SNAPPED *SHUT* ON YOU."

I CAN FEEL THEM...COMING CLOSER...
TOWARD US, IN PACKS... CONTROLLED.
BUT STILL PEOPLE.
YEAH? WELL, THEY WANTED TO BE GAMMA ZOMBIES.
I SAY WE PUT 'EM IN GAMMA GRAVES.
THAT'S NOT THE PLAN, CARL. YOU'RE WITH US, REMEMBER?
LEN, I DON'T THINK WE CAN USE THE ELEVATOR NOW--HEY!
WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE THE QUICK WAY DOWN. CARL--CAN YOU MAKE US A PATH?
LEAVE IT TO ME, HAIRBALL--
--I BEEN HOPIN' FOR AN EXCUSE TO USE MARY'S WEDDING PRESENT!
BOOM

KLANK
'SPECIALLY ON A PRETTY FACE LIKE *THIS* ONE!
THAT'S *SECONDARY ADAMANTIUM*, PAL!
PACKS A *PUNCH*, HUH?
*VERY NICE*, ABSORBING MAN.
SEE YOU *DOWN THERE*, FOLKS...
*DIVIDING* YOUR FORCES? I THOUGHT THE GENERAL TAUGHT YOU *BETTER*, STOCKPILE.
YOU DO *KNOW* THERE'S NOTHING DOWN THERE BUT *BANE TROOPERS* AND *GAMMA WOLVES*, RIGHT? NOT TO MENTION DADDY DEAREST *HIMSELF*.
STILL, MAYBE I SHOULD-- *EH?*
THE LIGHTS...?
NO.
NOT THE LIGHTS.
THE *DOOR*.
DON'T.
MY NAME'S *DEL*. SOMETHING *BAD* HAPPENED TO ME.
NOW I'M *SPOOKY*.


DON'T WANT TO SEE.
DON'T WANT TO SEE IT.
RICK DOESN'T LIKE TO LOOK. WE SEE A LOT.
LOTS OF SPOOKY IN THE GAMMA.
WHY DON'T YOU LOOK? HUH?
LOOK THROUGH MY EYES
...
THAT'S...THAT'S ALL YOU GOT, SPOOKSHOW?
A BUNCH OF SHADOWS? A FEW GHOSTS?
'CAUSE I'VE GOT PLENTY OF THOSE!
LEAVE THE KID ALONE, YA BIG--
NO. YOU TAKE HIS BACKUP.
SKAAR WAS THE GUINEA PIG FOR WHAT GREEN SPRING USED ON ME. IF I HADN'T WANTED...THIS...

...HE'S MY RESPONSIBILITY.
IT'S MY FIGHT.
NOT TO MENTION THAT IT'S A FIGHT SKAAR CAN'T RESIST.
WE'VE ALL GOT OUR ROLES TO PLAY IN THIS...
...AND IF I KEEP HIM DISTRACTED, THE OTHERS CAN DO THEIR PART--IF THEY MAKE IT.
I KNOW WHAT THE BANE TROOPERS ARE CAPABLE OF.
THERE'S SOME INTERFERENCE FROM THESE GOONS--BUT MY GAMMA DETECTOR'S PICKING UP A BIG SIGNAL.
THAT'LL BE THE CATHEXIS RAY...
LET'S HOPE SO.
WHOEVER GREEN SPRING RECRUITED, THEY'RE USED TO A DIFFERENT KIND OF COMBAT. HULK FIGHTS HAVE THEIR OWN RHYTHM.
EVEN SO--LET'S MOVE FAST.
KEEP YOUR FOCUS, DIONNE.
THOOM
WORRY ABOUT SKAAR.
"RESPONSIBILITY." DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH.
THIS IS JUST ANOTHER WAY TO GET DADDY'S ATTENTION.
GET SOME LOVE FROM THE GENERAL--
HNN!
MAYBE IT WAS. BUT THAT'S NOT REALLY MY FATHER.
JUST SOMEONE LIVING IN HIS BODY, USING MY UNFINISHED BUSINESS WITH HIM TO STRING ME ALONG.
TO MAKE ME HIS TOOL...

YOU KNOW HOW THAT FEELS.
DON'T YOU?
YOU...
I'VE KNOWN A LOT OF FOLKS LIKE SKAAR. SOMETIMES I'VE SEEN ONE IN THE MIRROR.
SOMEONE WITH EVERYTHING TO PROVE...TO A FATHER WHOSE LOVE HAD TO BE EARNED.
...YOU DON'T KNOW A DAMN THING ABOUT ME!
BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.
NOTHING!
DAD WAS A COLD MAN. HE DEMANDED PERFECTION-- AND WHEN HE DIDN'T GET IT, HE MADE SURE YOU KNEW.
REALLY? THAT'S YOUR MOVE?
YOU KNOW I'M JUST GONNA ABSORB THAT SWORD INTO MY BODY MASS. WHERE'S YOUR TACTICS, SOLDIER?
OR DID I HIT A RAW NERVE THERE?
SHUT UP...
BUT EVEN WITH ALL THAT, I COULD HAVE HAD A WORSE FATHER.
C'MON.
WHO ARE YOU REALLY THIS MAD AT?
I COULD HAVE HAD BRUCE BANNER.

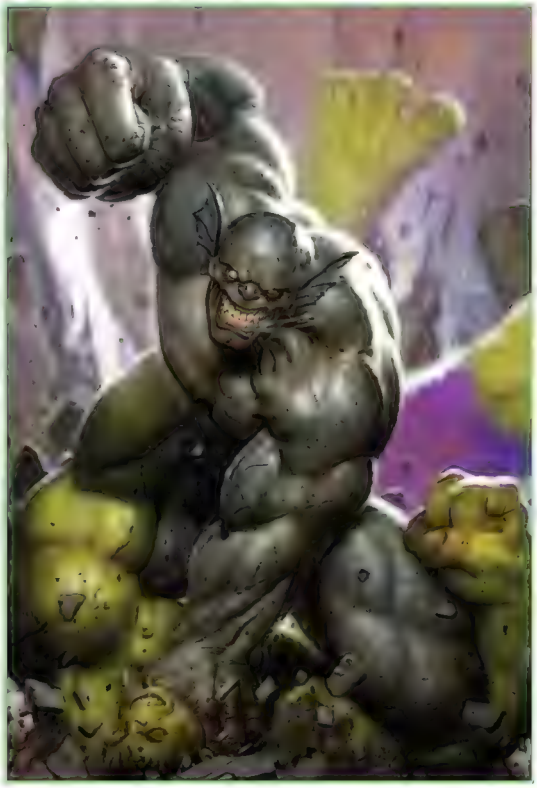
THE END RESULT WAS THE SAME. SKAAR WAS TRANSFORMED--FROM A KID WITH EVERYTHING TO PROVE...
...TO A WEAPON AGAINST HIS FATHER'S ENEMIES.
THERE IT IS. MY WORST MISTAKE.
CHARLENE--CAN YOU ROUTE THE PULSE THROUGH THE BROADCAST EQUIPMENT FROM HERE?
LOOKS LIKE IT'S ALREADY SET UP FOR SOMETHING SIMILAR. I'M GUESSING THEY IRRADIATE THE GRAFTS IN A SEPARATE CHAMBER.
I HOPE WE'RE NOT PLAYING INTO ABOMINATION'S HANDS HERE...
I GUESS IF THIS BLOWS UP IN OUR FACES, WE'LL KNOW WE SCREWED UP.
YOU MIGHT HAVE TO CHECK MY WORK BEFORE I MAKE THE FINAL CONNECTION...
WE'RE ON THE CLOCK, LEN. LET'S GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME.
BUT YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL WITH WEAPONS.
INPUT TRANSMIT FREQUENCY
MOVE IT AN INCH CLOCKWISE, CARL--THE ALIGNMENT NEEDS TO BE PERFECT.
THERE--THIS SHOULD BE IT--
YOU CAN BE AIMING THE KILL SHOT...
WAIT!
IT'S OVERLOADING! I THINK IT'S ABOUT TO--
...AND WITH JUST A SECOND OF CARELESSNESS...

...YOU END UP STARING DOWN THE BARREL.
LEN!
CARL!
NO!
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

*ABSOLUTE CARNAGE: IMMORTAL HULK* VARIANT BY INHYUK LEE

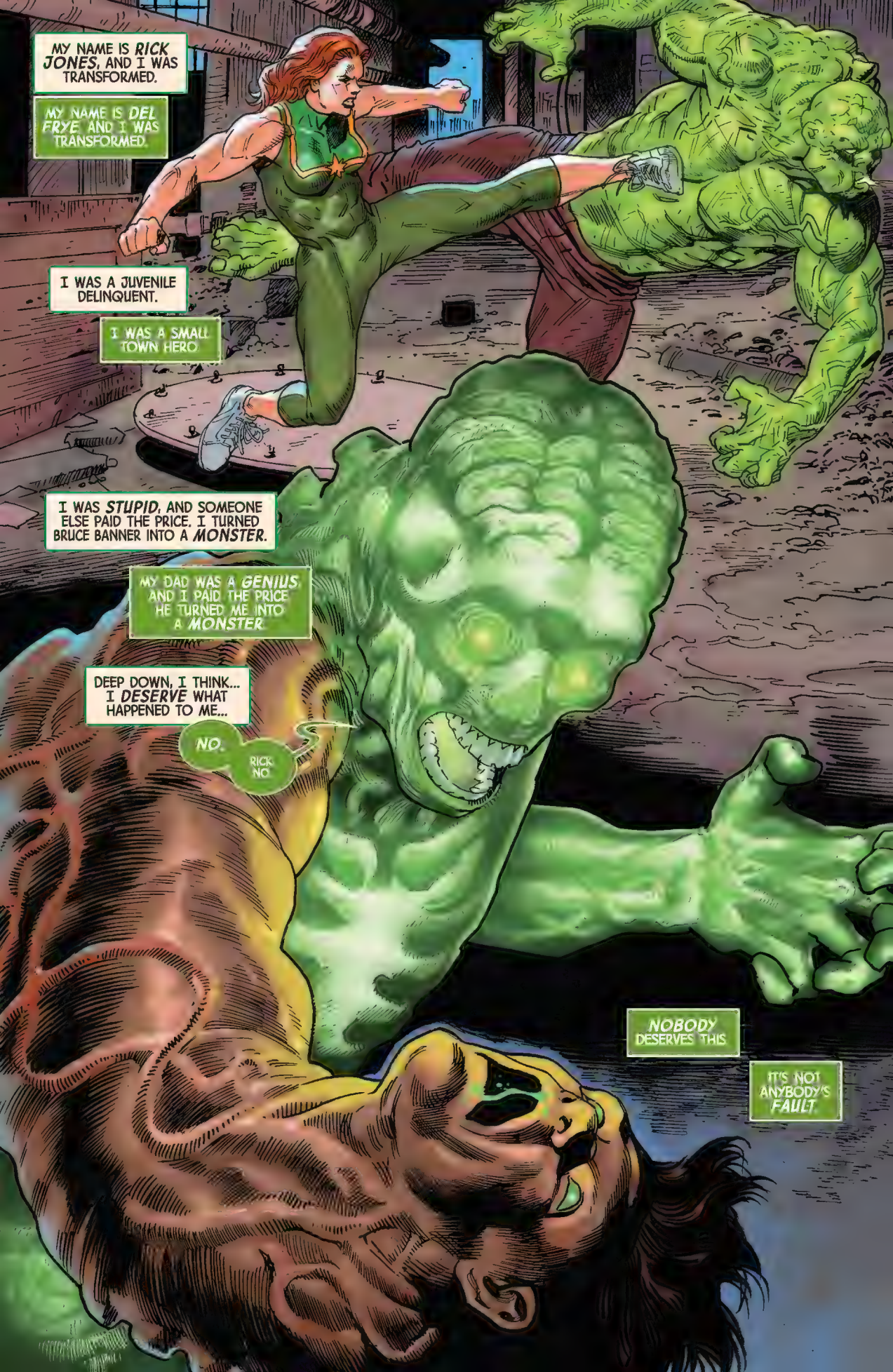
*ABSOLUTE CARNAGE: IMMORTAL HULK* CODEX VARIANT BY DALE KEOWN & JASON KEITH

#21 2ND PRINTING VARIANT BY ANDREA SORRENTINO



#22 BRING ON THE BAD GUYS VARIANT BY RYAN BROWN

GAMMA FLIGHT 5


MY NAME IS RICK JONES, AND I WAS TRANSFORMED.
MY NAME IS DEL FRYE AND I WAS TRANSFORMED.
I WAS A JUVENILE DELINQUENT.
I WAS A SMALL TOWN HERO.
I WAS STUPID, AND SOMEONE ELSE PAID THE PRICE. I TURNED BRUCE BANNER INTO A MONSTER.
MY DAD WAS A GENIUS, AND I PAID THE PRICE HE TURNED ME INTO A MONSTER.
DEEP DOWN, I THINK... I DESERVE WHAT HAPPENED TO ME...
NO.
RICK. NO.
NOBODY DESERVES THIS
IT'S NOT ANYBODY'S FAULT.

WHAT ABOUT THE LEADER?
WE SHOULD LET THAT GO
HE HURT US--
IT'S NOT HEALTHY TO THINK ABOUT--
I DON'T CARE WHAT'S HEALTHY. I DON'T CARE.
I'M JUST TIRED ALL THE TIME--SICK OF THIS, SICK OF EVERYTHING--
WELL, I'M SICK OF YOU, YOUR MESSED-UP LIFE IN MY HEAD--
YEAH? YOU NEVER LIVED AT ALL--
I NEVER EVEN LIVED
I NEVER GOT TO LIVE!
AAARRGH!
NOT A BAD BACKHAND, BOYS!
THAT'S THE LAST OF THEM, EH?
GOD, STOP IT, PUCK--STOP BEING NICE
HE MEANS WELL. IT'S NOT HIS FAULT.

IT'S NOT ANYBODY'S FAULT.
YOU HEARD THE MAN, SKAAR-- NOW IT'S JUST YOU...AND US.
AND THE MAN PULLING ON THOSE DADDY ISSUES OF YOURS LIKE THE TRIGGER OF A GUN...
HA!
LOOK WHO'S TALKING, STOCKPILE.
YOU'RE RIGHT. I DON'T LIKE BEING USED. AND MAYBE I AM SICK OF BEING FORTEAN'S SOLDIER.
BUT DO YOU REALLY THINK THAT MAKES US FRIENDS?
I THINK YOU KNOW HOW MANY OTHER MONSTERS THE MAN PRETENDING TO BE MY DAD IS GONNA MAKE.
SO ASK YOURSELF...
...DO YOU REALLY WANT THE COMPETITION?
YOU GOT ME, DADDY'S GIRL.
COME ON IF YOU'RE COMING.
AND GIVE ME BACK MY SWORD. I DON'T KNOW HOW YOUR BUDDIES ARE DOING DOWN THERE...

"...BUT SOMETHING JUST MADE A BIG BOOM."
...
WELL, THAT WAS UNPLEASANT.
LEN!
OH, THANK GOD-- I THOUGHT YOU WERE--
BITE YOUR TONGUE, CHARLENE. IT ALWAYS TOOK MORE TO STOP ME THAN A LITTLE GAMMA EXPLOSION-- EVEN IN MY ORIGINAL BODY.
AT THIS POINT, I'D BE MUCH MORE WORRIED ABOUT THE ABSORBING MAN...

...IF THE CLUE WASN'T IN THE NAME.
WHOO!
ABSORBING A CRAZY SCIENCE RAY WHILE IT'S BLOWING UP? TALK ABOUT A RUSH.
I AIN'T FELT LIKE THIS SINCE THE LAST BUMP I DID.
INTERESTING. YOU'VE ABSORBED THE PROPERTIES OF THE MACHINE IN ITS ENTIRETY. A LIVING CATHEXIS RAY...
I'VE SEEN HIM DO IT BEFORE. STILL IMPRESSIVE, THOUGH.
ONE SECOND-- I NEED TO CHECK THE READINGS...
DON'T ASK ME TO HOLD IT FOR LONG. ALL THIS HI-TECH--IT NEEDS A LOTTA CONCENTRATION. AND THE GAMMA DON'T HELP EITHER.
BUT I PROBABLY GOT AT LEAST ONE GOOD ZAP IN ME...
IT MIGHT COME TO THAT YET, CHARLENE?
ACTUALLY, LEN--I THINK WE GOT IT THE FIRST TIME. SORT OF, ANYWAY.
THE MACHINE MIGHT HAVE BLOWN UP ON US, BUT THE GAMMA BURST IT SENT OUT WAS THE RIGHT FREQUENCY...

"...SO THEY SHOULD BE SEEING THE RESULTS UP TOP RIGHT NOW."
SOMETHIN' WRONG?
JUST-- FEELIN' A LITTLE--
--HHORRP!
...
HOLY...
HHSSSS
HHRRPP--
WHAT WAS IN THEM *SUPPLEMENTS*...?
"FORTEAN'S *IMPLANTS*-- FORTIFY, THE GAMMA TAPEWORMS--GOT ENOUGH OF A BURST TO *DISLODGE* THEM FROM THEIR HOSTS..."

...BUT THERE COULD BE SOME ILL EFFECTS. HOPEFULLY NOTHING WORSE THAN A GASTRIC FLU.
BETTER THAN GAMMA ZOMBIFICATION, ANYWAY.
SO WE DID IT...
WE CURED THREE THOUSAND STOMACH BUGS-- WHOOP-DE-DOO--
--BUT THAT LEAVES THE BIG GAMMA IMPLANTS, DON'T IT? THE MILITARY-GRADE STUFF.
LIKE THOSE WEREWOLVES WE SAW COMIN' IN, OR DIONNE, OR SKAAR--OR THE GUY RUNNING THIS--
MY FRIENDS CALL ME EMIL.
MY ENEMIES... FOR THEM, I HAVE ANOTHER NAME...
...I AM ABOMINATION.
LET ME SHOW YOU WHY.

I'LL TAKE THEIR PET SCIENTIST.
IF SHE'S SMART ENOUGH TO NEGATE THE FORTIFY IMPLANTS, I WANT TO GET HER MEASURE. WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO USE HER.
ALL YOURS THEN.
YOU--
YOU LEAVE HER ALONE--
YOU WANT TO FIGHT?
I FIGHT THE HULK! ARE YOU A HULK, YOU HAIRY LITTLE ALSO-RAN?
NO! YOU ARE NOTHING!
LET HIM GO--
SHOOT ME, THEN. SHOOT THE ABOMINATION WITH A DOSE OF GAMMA.
I WOULD VERY MUCH ENJOY THAT, I THINK...

CARL!
IF YOU--
ALIANA...
...TAKE CARE OF HER, PLEASE.
AH-AH-AH...
EYES ON YOUR OWN WORK.
ALIANA ALBA.
YES, YES, AND YOU'RE CHARLENE McGOWAN.
I ASSUME WE'RE UP TO DATE ON EACH OTHER'S JOURNAL ARTICLES?
ZZZZNNN
HIDING, DOCTOR? REALLY? I HAVEN'T EVEN SET THIS THING TO FULL POWER!
IT'LL JUST HYPERACTIVATE YOUR NEURONS INSTEAD OF BURNING RIGHT THROUGH--
HNNH.
BURN HER IF YOU MUST, ALIANA.
GAMMAVOLK-- GO BACK UP SKAAR.

HAVE I EVER *NEEDED* BACKUP?

YOU'RE CLEAR, SKAAR!

*NO ONE USES ME!!!*

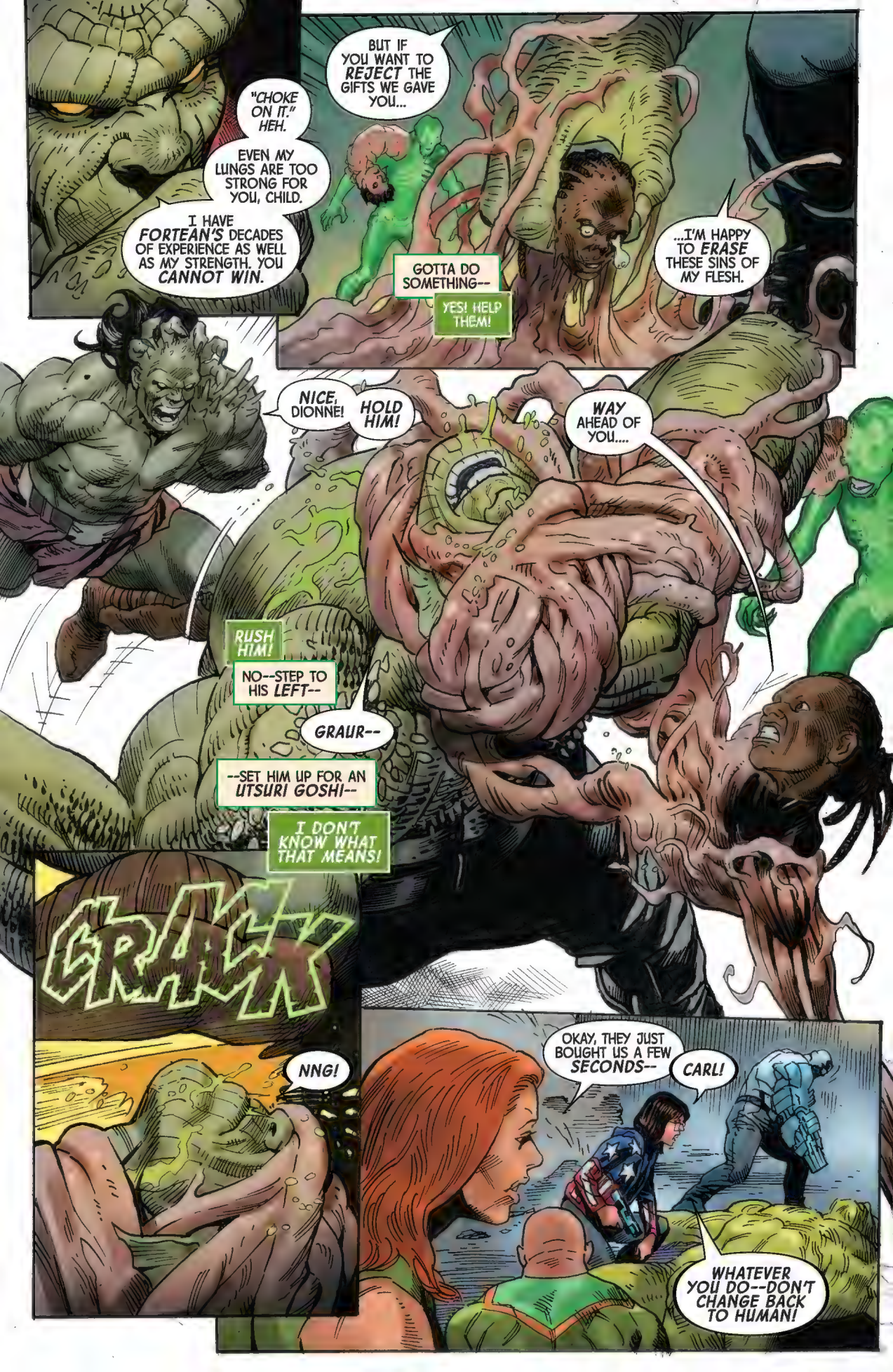
*SO DISAPPOINTING...*

GRAR!

GNLOK

PLEASE, YOU DON'T WANT TO SHOOT ME!
DON'T TELL ME WHAT I *WANT*, LITTLE GIRL.
GZZZZNNNT
CLK
NNNG!
DID YOU... *TRANSLOCATE* HER SHOT?
YOU FIGHT *DAREDEVIL* AND THE *HULK*, YOU LEARN TO THINK ON YOUR FEET.
YOU'RE A PROPER SUPER VILLAIN *NOW*, CHARLENE.
MARY WILL BE PROUD.

SKAAR NEEDS AN ASSIST!
DIONNE-- YOU THINK YOU CAN REALLY UNLEASH ON YOUR OWN FATHER?
I GOT PLENTY OF ISSUES TO WORK OUT!
YOU MONSTER!
YOU STOLE MY DAD'S FACE!
YOU USED HIS MEMORIES AND YOUR FLESH TO GIVE ME THIS!
WELL, I DON'T WANT IT! YOU HAVE IT!
YOU EAT IT!
HRGL!
YOU CHOKE ON--
WAIT--
HE'S-- HE'S INHALING ME--
DIONNE!
CHOMP


"CHOKE ON IT." HEH.
EVEN MY LUNGS ARE TOO STRONG FOR YOU, CHILD.
I HAVE FORTEAN'S DECADES OF EXPERIENCE AS WELL AS MY STRENGTH. YOU CANNOT WIN.
BUT IF YOU WANT TO REJECT THE GIFTS WE GAVE YOU...
...I'M HAPPY TO ERASE THESE SINS OF MY FLESH.
GOTTA DO SOMETHING--
YES! HELP THEM!
NICE, DIONNE! HOLD HIM!
WAY AHEAD OF YOU....
RUSH HIM!
NO--STEP TO HIS LEFT--
GRAUR--
--SET HIM UP FOR AN UTSURI GOSHI--
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS!
CRACK
NNG!
OKAY, THEY JUST BOUGHT US A FEW SECONDS--
CARL!
WHATEVER YOU DO--DON'T CHANGE BACK TO HUMAN!

I GOTTA-- CAN'T HOLD THIS FORM ANY LONGER, DOC--
ONE SHOT, YOU SAID! THAT'S ALL WE NEED!
IT'S ALL I GOT. BUT...WON'T IT MAKE HIM STRONGER...?
THE CATHEXIS RAY WAS DESIGNED TO CURE HULKS. THINK OF IT AS A GAMMA CENTRIFUGE.
IF YOU USE IT ON ABOMINATION, YOU CAN SEPARATE HIM FROM FORTEAN-- IT'LL WEAKEN HIM, AT LEAST.
HE'S ON HIS FEET--TAKE THE SHOT NOW, BEFORE--
WAIT. THAT'S WHAT THIS GIZMO DOES?
SPLITS PEOPLE APART?
WHY DIDN'T YA SAY SO?!

PATHETIC!
YOU CANNOT EVEN HIT ME--
HE--
HE HIT US--
HE SHOT US--
IT HURTS--
IT FEELS--
--FEELS SO--
--SO QUIET
RICK?
DEL!

A BEAUTIFUL THING.
YOU HAD ONE CHANCE TO DEFEAT ME--
AAHH!
MMGGH--
--AND YOU SPENT IT TO HELP YOUR FRIENDS. SUCH SOFTNESS FROM A HARD MAN.
WHAT A SHAME IF I CRUSHED JONES' FRAGILE LITTLE HEAD IN MY PALM AFTER ALL THAT.
THIS FIGHT IS OVER. STAND DOWN.
YOU CANNOT REACH ME BEFORE--
GENERAL FORTEAN.
I NEVER OFFERED YOU A FORMAL RESIGNATION.
GZZZNNNT

ARRRGH!
YOU... FORTEAN REMEMBERS YOU, McGOWAN.
NOW I WILL TOO.
KROOM
HE'S GETTING AWAY--
THAT'S A GOOD THING, JUDD. HE WIPED THE FLOOR WITH US.
HOW'D YOU KNOW ALBA'S GUN WOULD STOP HIM...?
SHE'S TOO SMART TO CARRY A WEAPON THAT COULDN'T.
COME ON...
"...LET'S HEAD UPSTAIRS."
LOOKS LIKE YOUR PLAN WORKED, DOCS.
INDEED. THOUGH I DON'T ENVY THEIR "GAMMA HANGOVER," EH?

THESE PEOPLE WILL SUFFER ALL KINDS OF SIDE EFFECTS FROM TAKING FORTIFY. THEY COULD USE A DOCTOR WITH EXPERTISE IN GAMMA MUTATION...
AND ONE HELL OF A THERAPIST.
WE DID DECIDE TO HELP THOSE THE SYSTEM FAILS. A RADICALIZED, RADIOACTIVE SMALL TOWN MAY WELL QUALIFY.
YOU NUTS? GYRICH AND HIS HULKBUSTERS WILL BE HERE IN 20 MINUTES--
OH, I THINK WE CAN MAKE A DEAL THERE.
UNLESS HE WANTS THE WORLD TO KNOW A ROGUE GOVERNMENT AGENCY TRANSFORMED A SMALL CHUNK OF HEARTLAND AMERICA INTO GAMMA TERRORISTS.
I'LL STICK AROUND--I HELPED MAKE THIS MESS. AND IF THERE'S A WAY TO GET DAD BACK, IT'S DOWN IN THAT LAB.
I DON'T HAVE A DEGREE OR ANYTHING, BUT I CAN TALK TO PEOPLE. HOW 'BOUT YOU, RICK?
NO OFFENSE, DEL...BUT I THINK I NEED SOME SPACE.
'S FAIR, BRO.
GONNA MISS YOU. IS THAT WEIRD?
A LITTLE BIT...
BUT I GET IT.
CRUSHER... CARL...I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY--
DON'T BOTHER. I DIDN'T DO IT FOR YOU, JONES.
GUYS LIKE YOU AND ME, WE MADE OUR BEDS.

BUT DEL...HE NEVER CHOSE THIS LIFE.
HE DIDN'T DESERVE WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM, Y'KNOW?
PRETTY DECENT KID ONCE TOLD ME...
NOBODY DOES.
WE WERE TRANSFORMED

**I *REALLY* USED TO WANT TO WRITE THE HULK ONE DAY. I DON'T ANYMORE.**

A few years back, when I was working exclusively as a writer for Marvel, I used to lobby then-editor in chief Axel Alonso to let me take a crack at ol' Jade Jaws. For one reason or another it never worked out and I never got a shot at writing Hulk. But nonetheless, I used to have an idea of how I would approach the character if given the chance. Of all the Marvel heroes, Hulk was the one I coveted the most. (Well, maybe Frank Castle too, but let's stay on point.) So yeah, I really used to want to write the Hulk, but I don't anymore. And you know why? Because Al Ewing has gone and ruined it for me and all other writers by writing the *perfect* Hulk comic book. So what's the point now? As a writer, when you take on an established Marvel or DC character, it's usually because you feel like you have something new to say with them. Some new angle or take on the character that will feel fresh or expose some as-yet-undeveloped aspect of them. Well, if I were suddenly handed the Hulk today, I would be at a total loss. When trying to think of anything to do with Green Jeans I'd just point to *Immortal Hulk* and say "That."

Now, I know that Mr. Ewing has not done this feat alone. There is his main collaborator, Joe Bennett, as well as a host of talented inkers, artists, colorists and editors. And I'll get to them too, but let's start with Al's approach to building *Immortal Hulk* and why it is so damn brilliant. First, Al tore everything down and brought the Hulk back down to his essential components. I know that there have been a lot of incredible Hulk stories where the character has been a "super hero." But to me, at his very core, Hulk is a *monster,* and monsters should be *scary*. And Al has made Hulk scary again. One of the smartest things Al did was throw the Hulk rule book out the window. Suddenly we don't know what his full powers are or how they work. And as a result of this unpredictability, he becomes terrifying again. So this, first and foremost, is a horror book, and it's all the better for it.

Secondly, Al has constructed the series so that each issue feels like a contained, satisfying story while also building a larger narrative. This is really not easy to do. In today's marketplace of decompressed storytelling and writing for the trade, doing done-in-one stories has gone out of vogue. And I think the big reason for that is because it is *hard* to do. But Ewing and company have succeeded in doing this, and the result is a book that you feel like you *have* to buy every month. You don't want to wait for the trade to come out…you need to see what happens this issue. Speaking for myself, this book has almost single-handedly got me back into the comic shop every month to grab the new issue. And each issue continues to be compelling and satisfying.

Okay, I can't go any further without getting into the artwork. The visual rock of this series is obviously Joe Bennett. I have been lucky enough to work with Joe myself, and I know that he is the consummate professional. He's extremely generous and reliable. But the artwork in *Immortal Hulk* goes far beyond just reliable; it is downright terrifying and brilliant. Along with inker Ruy José, Joe has taken his work to a whole new level. He has turned the Hulk into a mesmerizing portrait of body horror worthy of John Carpenter. The way he twists and contorts the Hulk's body and the bodies of his many adversaries, finding new ways to express the torment and power of these characters, is nothing short of breathtaking.

Another wonderful thing Al, Joe, Ruy and the whole team do is *build.* Stripping a character down to its core is great, but it is only phase one. Once you've exposed the foundation, you need to start building on it again, and this is where *Immortal Hulk* really hooks you. Over the course of this series, the creative team is building a whole new horror-focused mythology around the Hulk and his past. It's mysterious, chilling and groundbreaking. And I am not going to spoil any of it by saying any more here. But you are in for *one hell* of a ride. And it's not just Hulk, it's the supporting cast that Ewing and Bennett build and surround the Hulk with that gives this book real life. From reporter Jackie McGee to Puck and Sasquatch from Alpha Flight to the cool rogues' gallery of monsters new and old that Hulk comes up against, the cast just keeps growing and growing, but it never becomes unwieldy. Everyone has their place and their purpose in the story, and it just works so damn well.

I don't really know what else to say. Like I said, Al Ewing, Joe Bennett and all the gifted artists, colorists, letterers and editors who built *Immortal Hulk* have pretty much said it all. You just need to read it. Then reread it. This is as perfect a monthly comic book as you are going to find. I may not have gotten the chance to write the Hulk, but I did get a chance to read *Immortal Hulk.* And I am all the better for it. And you will be too. As a writer, this is the kind of book that inspires me to be better and to try new things. As a reader, it's the kind of book that excites me and reminds me over and over again why I love comics so much.

**JEFF LEMIRE**
TORONTO, MAY 2019

## HULK TIMELINE FROM *AVENGERS #684*

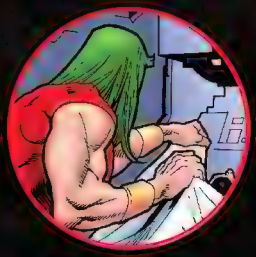
# THE ASSEMBLY

He cannot be killed. He cannot be contained. He is THE IMMORTAL HULK, and he'll NEVER stop. But where did he begin? Here's your roadmap to follow the story events, old and new, that are referenced in our Hulk prologue:

Pages 2-3:
**INCREDIBLE HULK #1**

Page 4, Panel 1:
**AVENGERS: ULTRON FOREVER #1**

Page 4, Panel 3:
**TALES TO ASTONISH #69**



Page 4, Panel 5:
**INCREDIBLE HULK #225**

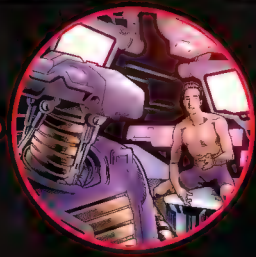
Page 4, Panel 7:
**INCREDIBLE HULK #367**

Page 4, Panel 9:
**INCREDIBLE HULK #446**

Page 4, Panel 11:
**INDESTRUCTIBLE HULK #20**

Pages 5-6:
**CIVIL WAR II #3**

Pages 6-7:
**UNCANNNY AVENGERS #17**



Page 8:
**SECRET EMPIRE #5**

Page 9:
**SECRET EMPIRE #6**

## HULK THOUGHTS

Initial series editor Tom Brevoort compiled these thoughts about the Hulk when developing the series with writer Al Ewing.

Banner is spiritual, not materialistic—can't be, can own nothing. He is about experiences, the one thing that he can carry with him.

The Hulk is a condition, like having diabetes. Banner is actively living with his condition. He's trying to do good with it, to balance the scales overall, to lead a moral life despite the fact that there's this part of him that he cannot control. He's trying to atone, to even the scoreboard, to leave more good in the world than bad.

The Hulk is an outsider, counterculture. He represents the underdog, the strange, the ill fit. He doesn't like institutions, he's anti-civilization. Tribal. Primal. Aggressive like a hunter. But if you leave him be, he'll leave you be.

The Hulk should be a little bit nasty. A feeling of the caged animal within. A *dollop* of Wolverine. Nobody including the reader should ever feel 100% safe in the Hulk's presence.

New cast.

Worth researching bipolar behavior—seems like there could be a key into the Banner/Hulk psyche there, in that the two seem like the opposite ends of a bipolar personality.

Banner travels the world. He can go anywhere in relative safety. He seeks out those that need his help. He's about protecting and raising up the underdog as well. The Hulk destroys, Banner builds.

Jekyll/Hyde.

We need a thought process analogous to Alan Moore on *Swamp Thing*. Rather than doing the same stories again and again, how can we think about the skeleton of this series and build it up in a different way into something new?

The Hulk is as much a suspense/horror comic as it is a super-hero comic. Like in *Swamp Thing*, super heroes who come into the series should be presented through the particular lens of its worldview.

Thought: As a release, Banner lets the Hulk out at night to relieve the tension, hearkening back in a way to his earliest appearances while helping to sustain Banner's regular day life.

## PROTOTYPIC HULK SERIES OPENING:

### PAGE 1

Open on a rally/gathering for some nefarious group. I'm going to use Hydra as a placeholder here, simply because most of our best-known nefarious groups have been put through the wringer of late. But the identity of the group isn't important, the moment is. It's the culmination of readiness of some evil plan—some thing they're going to be doing, some act of terror on a massive scale that they intend to perpetrate. The First Order rally from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. And the main guy is firing up the troops for action, holding his own Hitler rally, his own Patton fire-up speech. But then he's interrupted by a voice from the wings. His eyes cut.

(THOUGHT: Could this be corporate? Something like Roxxon about to do drilling or displace Indigenous peoples so that they can pillage the land? So less James Bond and more real-world, and more about the themes of the series.)

### PAGE 2

And he sees Bruce Banner. Perhaps Banner is slow-clapping. He's hesitant, a little bit awkward, but firm. And Banner begins to tell them that their plan, their operation, sounds very good, very interesting, but there's a variable in the equation that they haven't considered. See, he's heard about them and what they've been doing in this region, and it makes him angry. It makes him very angry indeed. But, being a moral man, he needs to give them one warning, one chance to—and then a gunshot explodes Banner's head and he falls backward, sudden and shocking.

### PAGE 3

Cut back, and the Leader has a smoking gun, having just shot down this absurd intruder. The crowd goes wild, they're ready to fight, to kill, to carry out their mission, and the Leader is swept up in their zeal and capitalizes on the moment to drive their passions ever higher. But as we follow this rhetoric for a panel or two, we see a large mass, a shadow, beginning to rise up on the wall behind the Leader, growing ever larger, until the Leader or the crowd begins to notice that something is happening and their attention shifts…

### PAGES 4-5

Double-page spread. And it's the Hulk, just filling the page, looking as angry and as unstoppable as we've ever seen him before. Perhaps the Leader is still in this shot to give us a sense of scale. The Hulk bellows his rage—we can see some small evidence of his rapidly diminishing head wound, the green blood of the wound receding. But this is an impact moment, the first time we see our creature-protagonist, so it's all about impact.

### PAGE 6

And we immediately cut to the aftermath. It's carnage and destruction as far as the eye can see. Men and machines strewn and mangled—the men look like they've been beaten half to death but not actually dead, not bloody or torn apart or anything. But it's the aftermath of a bomb strike. And at the center of the blast radius, there's the tiny figure of Bruce Banner. Banner wakes, gets up unsteadily, dusts himself off—he's in the tatters of his clothes at this point—he half-glances around, mutters that he tried to warn them and shuffles off into the night.

My guess is that PAGE 7 would be Banner meeting with whatever people or group were going to be displaced or ravaged by these guys, who would give him their thanks as he told them that the problem had been taken care of and the bad guys wouldn't be coming back again. He'd be dressed in new clothes, probably with some local flavor and probably piled with small gifts of food or other trinkets. He'd accept the food but gently turn down the objects, explaining that material goods hold no appeal for him—he cannot keep anything save the clothes on his back (and often not even those). But he thanks them for their hospitality and prepares to move on.

## "WHAT DO YOU THINK?"

When I was small — 7, maybe 8 — my school library had, squirreled away on a bookshelf like a hidden secret, a pocket-sized reprint of the first six issues of *Incredible Hulk*. A comic about my favorite super hero that I could read during actual reading period! As if it were a real book! Truly, this was buried treasure!

And it was. Those first six issues are the primal meat, a bubbling primordial soup of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, all trying to work out exactly what kind of monster they've made. It was a horror book, to begin with — Bruce Banner, sitting and waiting for the night to come. Waiting to change into his terrifying opposite, the Jungian shadow-side — everything he hid from the world and tried to pretend wasn't inside him. "How do I know I won't keep changing," he breathes, with a thousand-year stare that's a strange mix of fear and desire, "into that brutal, bestial mockery of a human —— that creature which fears nothing — which despises reason and worships power!"

Who was this nighttime Lord of Misrule, this shambling monstrosity pretending to be the gentle giant from my TV cartoons? What had he done with the Hulk I knew?

Even the cover of issue #1 — faithfully reproduced — seemed strange and sinister. "The Strangest Man of All Time!!" howled the strapline, a promise of something weirder and more eldritch than the jolly green goliath I knew. But what really grabbed the eye was a stylish question-mark caption, asking "is he MAN or MONSTER or..." — a break in the caption, a pregnant pause — "is he BOTH." No punctuation — the caption itself was the question mark at the end of the sentence — and that made it seem even more ominous and significant to my child eyes. It felt like a key.

These are the things that echo in your head for thirty years and change.

And thirty-years-and-change later, through luck and synchronicity —— and, yes, the hard graft of pitching and competing and turning down other work to make room for it —— I got the job of writing the Hulk. A Hulk who was ping-ponging back and forth from death like a yo-yo. A Hulk who was technically dead...but whom no writer seemed to be able to leave that way. How could they? The Hulk was too powerful. Too vivid. The Hulk just couldn't be dead.

The Hulk couldn't die.

Imagine a Hulk like that. A massive breathing engine of muscle and power, that we only saw in mirrors, or in the darkest corner of the night. As immense and potent as a childhood symbol. The strongest there is. The strangest man of all time.

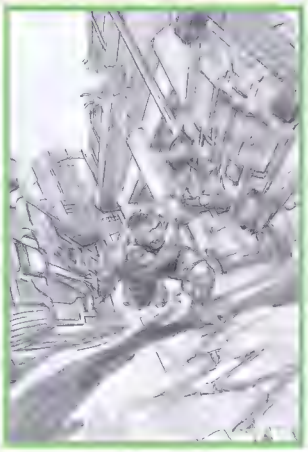
When that Hulk looks back at us — can it see what we are? See our souls as clearly as our bodies? Smell our lies as we tell them? Does it know everything we've done, everything we are? And when it speaks — in that terrible voice, like granite crumbling, like the tomb breaking open — what judgment will it pass upon us?

Are we man or monster or...are we both?

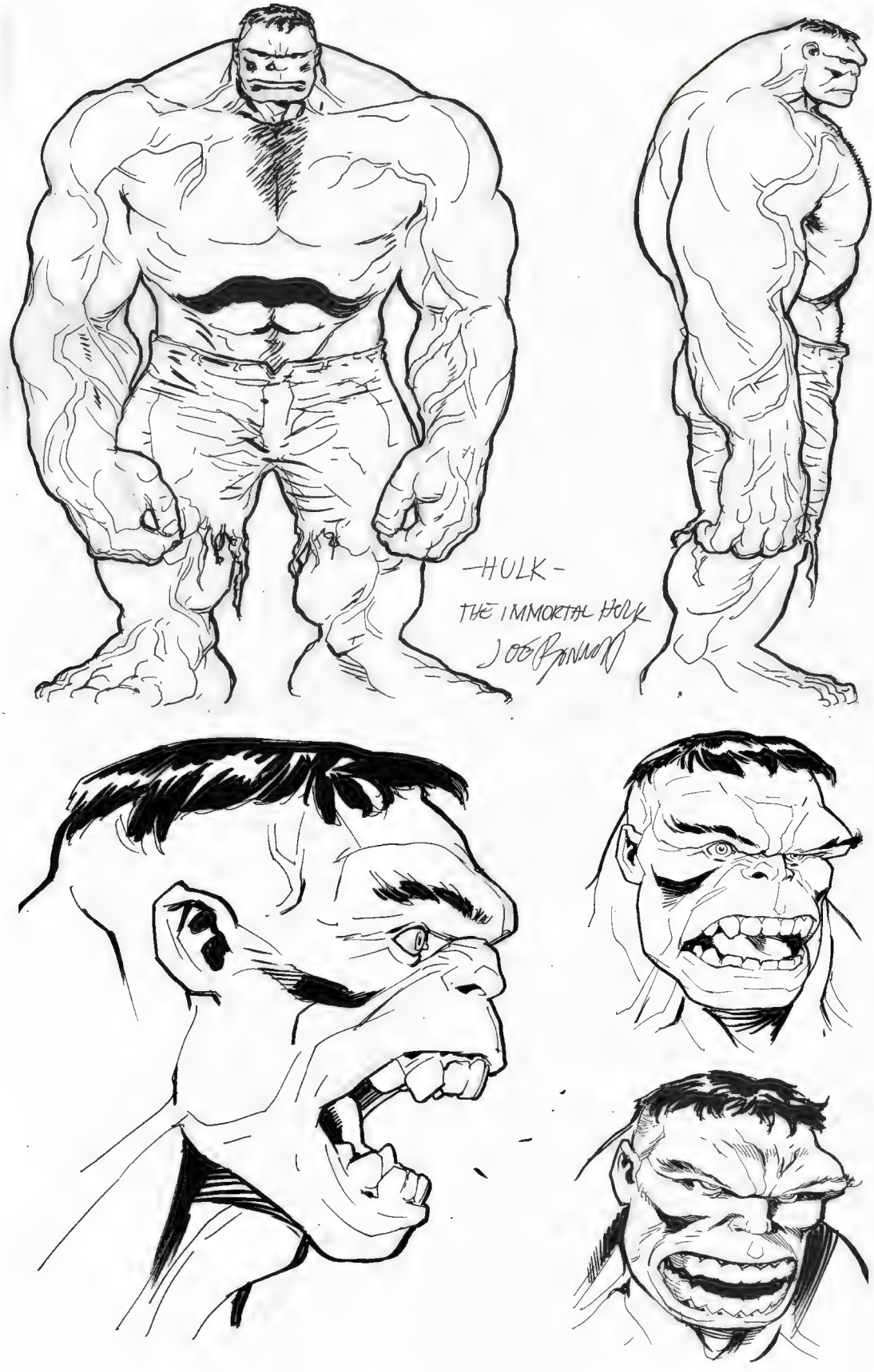
What do you think?

— AL EWING

COVER SKETCHES AND LOGO DESIGN BY ALEX ROSS



## CHARACTER DESIGNS BY JOE BENNETT



JACKIE MCGEE
-THE IMMORTAL HULK-
JOE BENNETT

BRUCE BANNER
-THE IMMORTAL HULK
JOE BENNETT

WALTER LANGKOWSKI
-THE IMMORTAL HULK-
JOE BENNETT

SASQUATCH
THE IMMORTAL HULK
JOE BENNETT

#23 IMMORTAL VARIANT BY DALE KEOWN & JASON KEITH

#24 VARIANT BY JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & DEAN WHITE

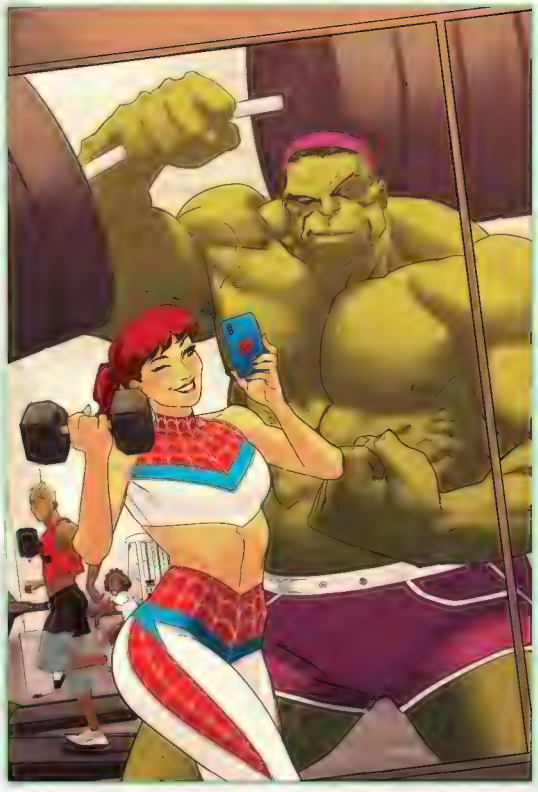
#23 2ND PRINTING VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

#24 2ND PRINTING VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

#25 2ND PRINTING VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

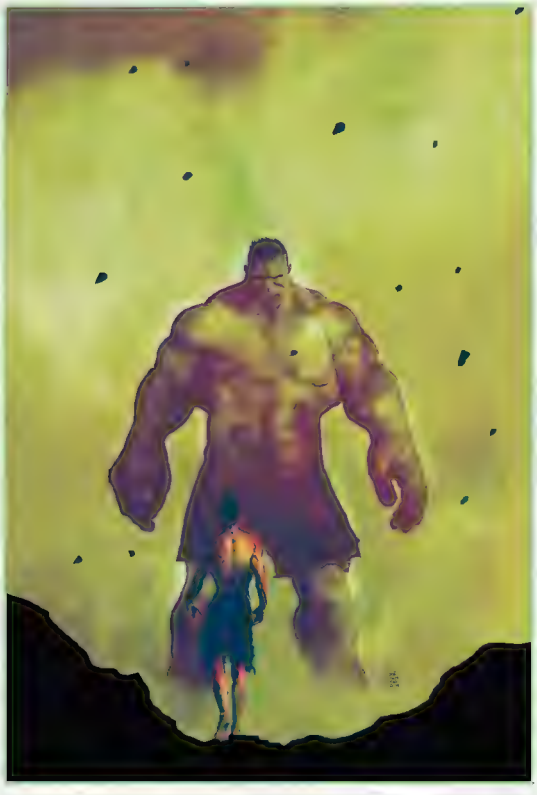
#25 VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & DEAN WHITE

#25 HIDDEN GEM VARIANT BY
GENE COLAN, RUDY NEBRES & JASON KEITH



#25 MARY JANE VARIANT BY
KRIS ANKA

#25 VARIANT BY
ED McGUINNESS & DAVID CURIEL



#25 VARIANT BY
ANDREA SORRENTINO

#25 VARIANT BY
RON LIM & ALEX ROSS

#26 2ND PRINTING VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

#27 2ND PRINTING VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

#27 2099 VARIANT BY
TOM RANEY & RACHELLE ROSENBERG

#28 2020 VARIANT BY
DALE KEOWN & JASON KEITH

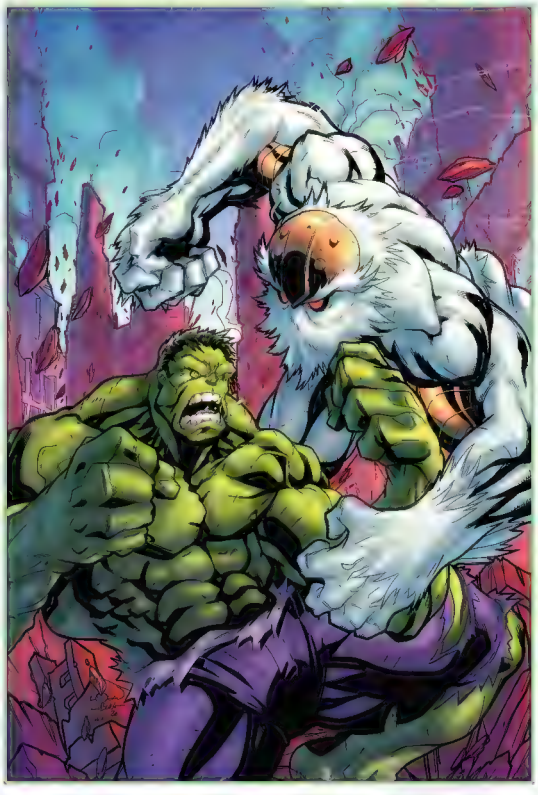
#29 MARVELS X VARIANT BY
NICK BRADSHAW & JASON KEITH

#30 MARVELS X VARIANT BY
MIKE DEL MUNDO

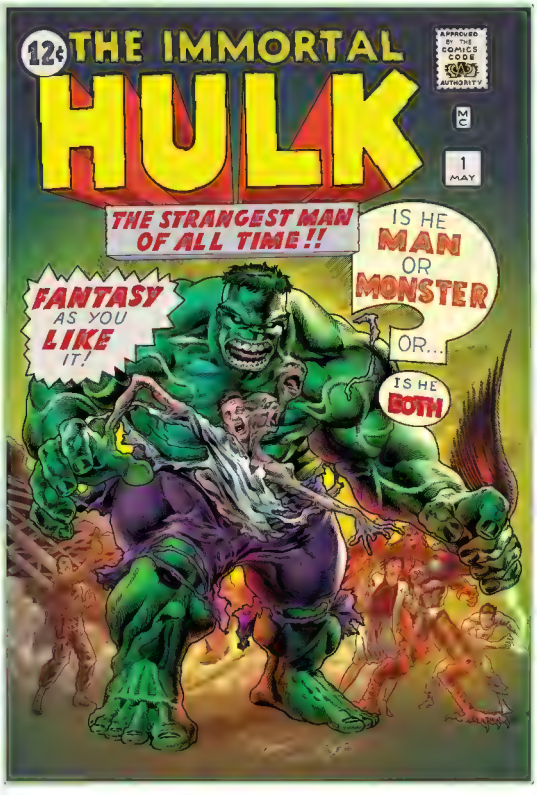
#31 GWEN STACY VARIANT BY
DAVID NAKAYAMA

#31 VARIANT BY
GEOFF SHAW & DEAN WHITE

#32 SPIDER-WOMAN VARIANT BY
PATCH ZIRCHER & DAVE McCAIG



#33 VARIANT BY
LOGAN LUBERA & RACHELLE ROSENBERG




#33 HOMAGE VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

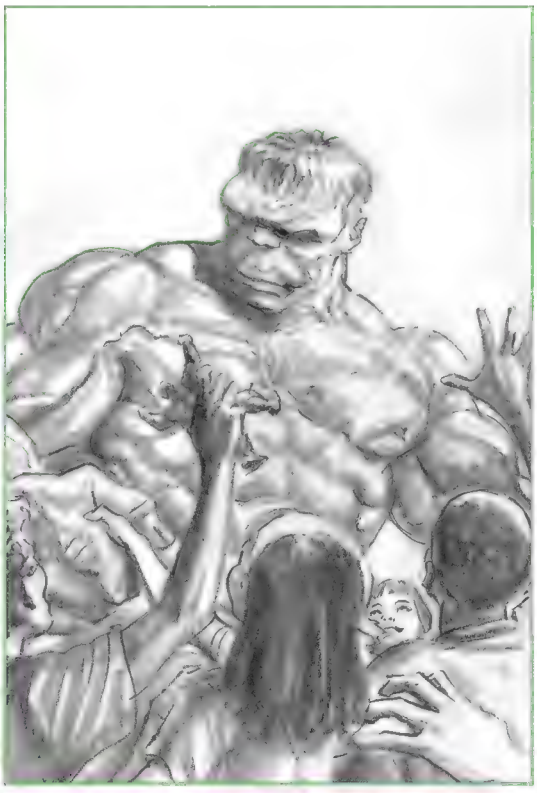
#33 HIDDEN GEM VARIANT BY
WALTER SIMONSON & JASON KEITH

#33 VARIANT BY
RON LIM & ISRAEL SILVA

#33 VARIANT BY
STEVE SKROCE & DAVE STEWART

#33 SPIDER-WOMAN VARIANT BY
CORY SMITH & MATHEUS LOPES

#34 MARVEL ZOMBIES VARIANT BY
INHYUK LEE



#35 2ND PRINTING VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

#37 HEROES AT HOME VARIANT BY GURIHIRU & ZEB WELLS

#37 TIMELESS VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

#37 TIMELESS SKETCH VARIANT BY
ALEX ROSS

*IMMORTAL SHE-HULK* TIMELESS
VARIANT BY ALEX ROSS

*IMMORTAL SHE-HULK* TIMELESS SKETCH
VARIANT BY ALEX ROSS

*IMMORTAL SHE-HULK EMPYRE*
VARIANT BY SIMONE DI MEO

#38 LIVING HULK HORROR VARIANT BY
MIKE DEL MUNDO

#38 VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

#39 VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

#40 SPOILER VARIANT BY
SKOTTIE YOUNG

#40 SHE-HULK PHOENIX VARIANT BY
TAURIN CLARKE

#40 VARIANT BY
JEFFREY VEREGGE

*KING IN BLACK: IMMORTAL HULK* VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

*KING IN BLACK: IMMORTAL HULK* SANTA CLAUS VARIANT BY AARON KUDER & MATTHEW WILSON

#42 KNULLIFIED VARIANT BY ALEXANDER LOZANO

#42 HOMAGE VARIANT BY JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

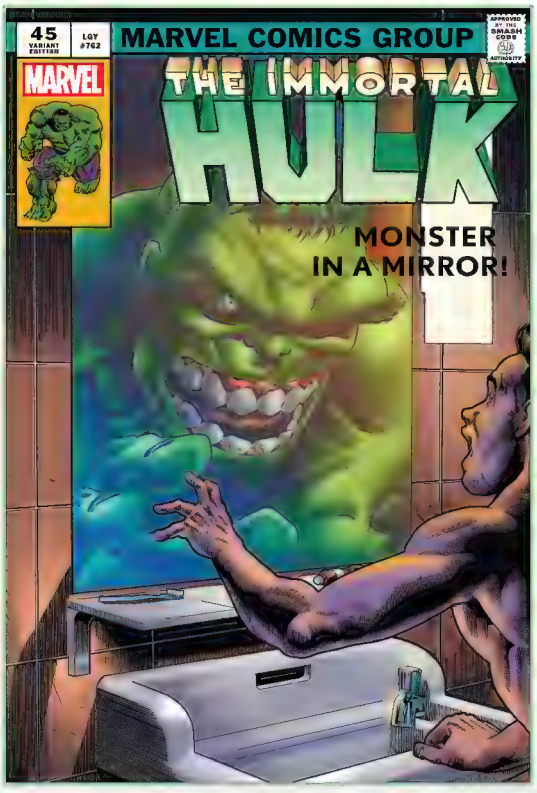
#43 HOMAGE VARIANT BY JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

#44 HOMAGE VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

#44 TWO-TONE VARIANT BY
MICHAEL CHO

#45 HEROES REBORN VARIANT BY
CARLOS PACHECO, RAFAEL FONTERIZ & MATT MILLA

#45 DEADPOOL 30TH ANNIVERSARY
VARIANT BY ROB LIEFELD




#45 HOMAGE VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

#46 HOMAGE VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

#47 HOMAGE VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

#47 SPIDER-MAN VILLAINS VARIANT BY
DECLAN SHALVEY

#48 HOMAGE VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

#48 MARVEL ANIME VARIANT BY
PEACH MOMOKO

#49 HOMAGE VARIANT BY
JOE BENNETT, RUY JOSÉ & PAUL MOUNTS

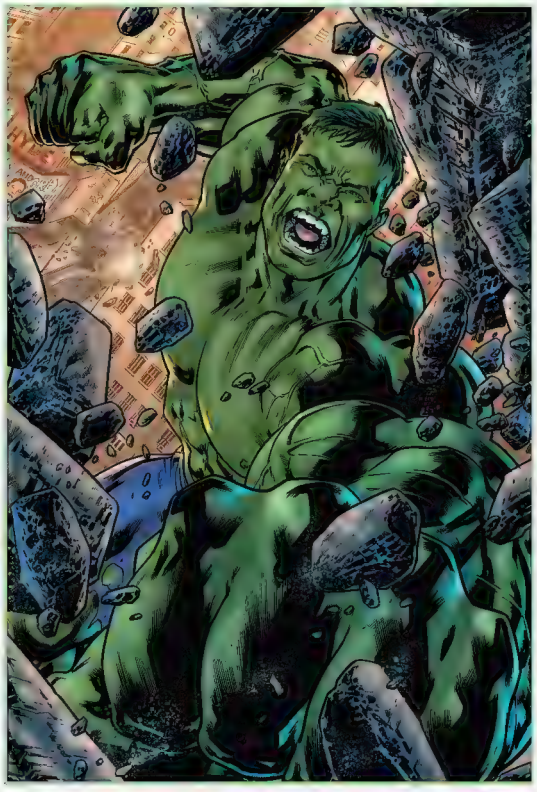
#49 AMADEUS CHO ASIAN VOICES
VARIANT BY INHYUK LEE

#50 VARIANT BY
JEN BARTEL

#50 VARIANT BY
CREEES LEE & JESUS ABURTOV

#50 VARIANT BY
GARY FRANK & BRAD ANDERSON

#50 VARIANT BY
SANFORD GREENE



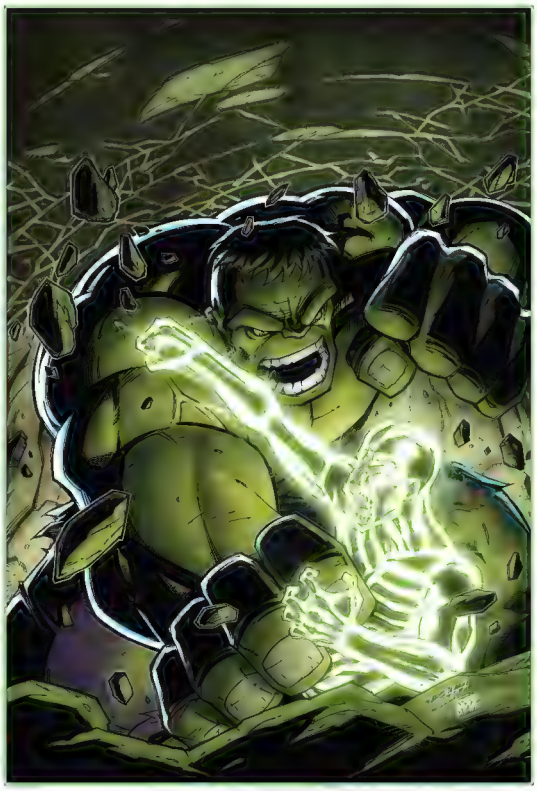
#50 VARIANT BY
BRYAN HITCH & ALEX SINCLAIR

#50 VARIANT BY
INHYUK LEE

#50 MARVEL MASTERPIECES VARIANT BY
JOE JUSKO

#50 HIDDEN GEM VARIANT BY
JACK KIRBY & JASON KEITH

#50 VARIANT BY
ED McGUINNESS & LAURA MARTIN



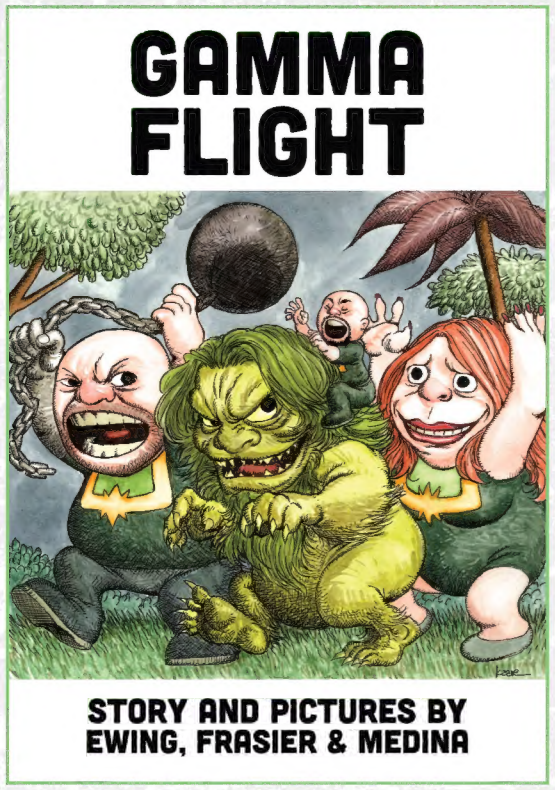
#50 VARIANT BY
RON LIM & ISRAEL SILVA

#50 VARIANT BY CARLOS PACHECO,
RAFAEL FONTERIZ & MARCIO MENYZ

#50 FORESHADOW VARIANT BY
RYAN STEGMAN, JP MAYER & JASON KEITH

***GAMMA FLIGHT* #1-5 CONNECTING VARIANTS**

**BY CARLOS PACHECO, RAFAEL FONTERIZ & MARCIO MENYZ**




***GAMMA FLIGHT* #1 VARIANT BY**
KAARE ANDREWS

***GAMMA FLIGHT* #1 STORMBREAKERS VARIANT BY**
JOSHUA CASSARA & ALEX SINCLAIR

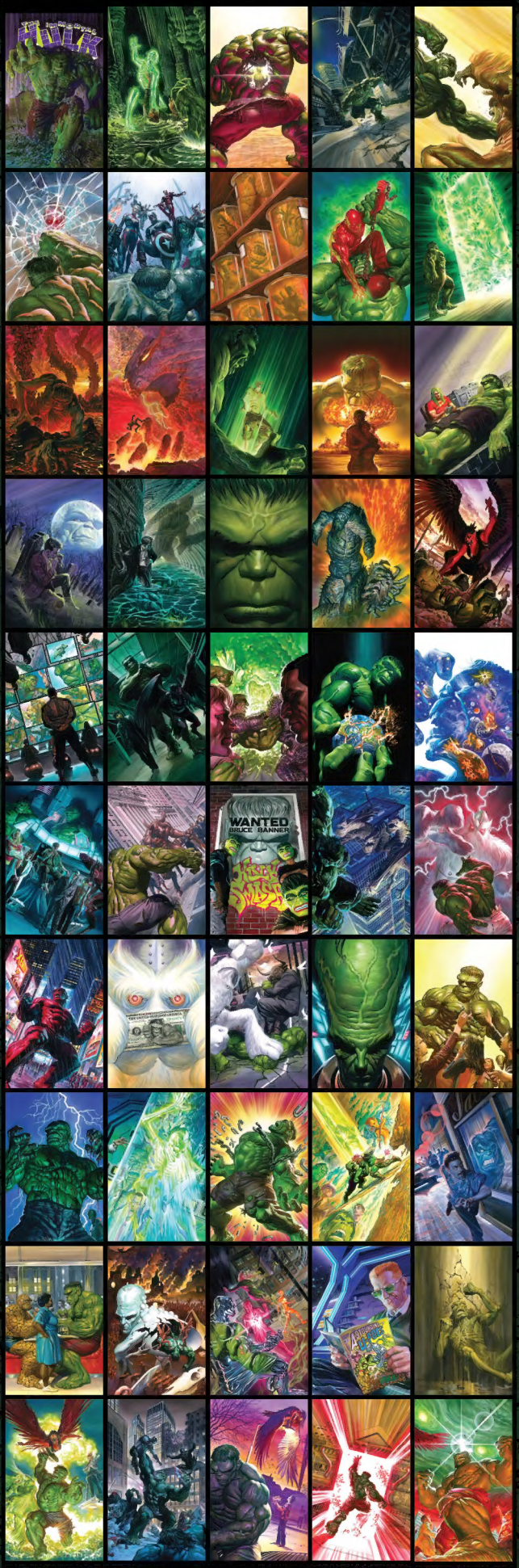
***GAMMA FLIGHT* #1 VARIANT BY**
DUSTIN WEAVER

***GAMMA FLIGHT #2* VARIANT BY**
**SKOTTIE YOUNG**

***GAMMA FLIGHT #3* VARIANT BY**
**KYLE HOTZ & FRANK MARTIN**

***GAMMA FLIGHT #4* VARIANT BY**
**PATCH ZIRCHER & JESUS ABURTOV**

***GAMMA FLIGHT #5* VARIANT BY**
**JAMES STOKOE**

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**EVERY TIME BRUCE BANNER DIES**, he rises again — as an unstoppable, gamma-powered force of nature. The Hulk is being hunted by the government, by the mysterious Shadow Base, even by the Avengers. But Bruce has even bigger problems. Something terrible has infected him. Something with unspeakable plans for humanity. And the answers lie beyond…the Green Door! Al Ewing and Joe Bennett reinvent a Marvel icon in terrifying fashion, resulting in a Hulk comic unlike anything you have ever read before!

Collecting *Immortal Hulk #1-50* and *#0*, *Immortal Hulk: The Best Defense*, *Defenders: The Best Defense*, *Absolute Carnage: Immortal Hulk*, *Immortal She-Hulk #1*, *King in Black: Immortal Hulk*, *Gamma Flight #1-5*, and material from *Avengers (2018) #684* and *Immortal Hulk: Time of Monsters*.

T+

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